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TONY



CONSTABLE FICTION

**RECOMPENCE : A SEQUEL TO
SIMON CALLED PETER**

By **Robert Keable**

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OLD SINS HAVE LONG SHADOWS

By **Mrs. Victor Rickard**, author of
**THE LIGHT ABOVE THE CROSS
ROADS**

ORANGE STREET, LONDON

TONY

BY

STEPHEN HUDSON

AUTHOR OF

*"PRINCE HEMPSEED," "ELINOR COLHOUSE" &
"RICHARD KURT"*

LONDON

CONSTABLE & CO. LTD

1924

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TONY

I

IT was so like you, my brother, to try to tell the story without bringing me into it, from sheer funk of representing me as I really was. Now you know it can't be done.

Of the two I had the best of it until almost the end because I hadn't your fears. Of course, the drivellers think cowardice is only of one sort. Though we were never lions, I suppose we had as much physical courage as our neighbours. But it's the other kind that matters, the kind Myrtle says she likes in men she calls "Kings of the earth." They are simply men who aren't afraid. I don't pretend to have been a king of the earth, but I wasn't afraid of myself. If I wanted to tell a lie, I told a lie. I told lies for the fun of it, to get something or to get out of something. And I told them damned well, so well that I didn't

always know when I was lying or when I wasn't. But you were afraid of yourself and afraid of lies. You never lied for the fun of it, or if you did, you gave yourself away the next minute. You lied out of cowardice, either to save your own face or, what was far worse, to spare, what you call, people's feelings, as though, if they're worth sparing, they won't take care of them themselves. A few people like Myrtle call that your goodness. You know it isn't. Anyhow, without me the whole story can't be told. From the very beginning I had a share in your life, and intermittent as that share may have been, it was dominant at certain moments.

You ought to have told about my being at St. Vincent's, you ought to have explained how much we always loved each other but that we always quarrelled, mostly because of your jealousy. You wanted everybody's love for yourself first, after that you didn't mind being generous. And you ought to have told how you bullied me—and then were sorry and kissed me—and of how I always thought you were right when we were small. In fact I went on thinking you were right up to the very end, only you always went the wrong way about everything. You ought at least to have mentioned my having shared those beastly tutors with you, and about our locking that awful one Whyte into the stable at Cray-

thorne and about our watering the roses with manure-water because the governor wouldn't let us make a cricket pitch on the lawn ; that was my idea. You ought to have brought me in at Heidelberg, when I threw my knapsack out of the train window and queered the governor's rotten scheme for a walking tour. How we both loathed walking ! And how could you help mentioning that it was after our talking it over the whole last night of the holidays that you made up your mind to bolt on your way back to Clive and that when you went off to America, I got the chuck at Eton and they sent me to old Reinhardt at Bonn.

As to what happened there, I told the whole story later to Elinor ; it was like you never to ask me about it. Fear again. Fear, this time of making me feel ashamed, as though telling you and our talking it all over wasn't the best way of getting rid of that shame feeling. The governor and mother ought to have been ashamed of themselves for saddling me with a rotten German tutor, not of me as they said they were. I don't think you ever knew, even, what I got the sack from Eton for. It wasn't for anything much, just for general rotting about, and at the end for doing a slide up to town with Fitz. That did us both in, but it didn't matter to him then, and has never mattered to him since.

We hardly ever wrote to each other, I only remember one decent letter from America after the Sullivan-Kilrain fight and I wrote you a long one about Frida just before I left Hamburg. In that letter I gave you an account of the row I got into with Uncle Fred while he was on a visit to the aunts through my bringing a girl into old Jacob's study and of how Frida came to the rescue and proposed my going to her father's at Copenhagen. The governor, as always, ready for any dodge to get rid of me, jumped at it. Good little sort, Frida, and if ever I could have stuck to anyone or anything, I should have stuck to her and made good at old Damm's. It ended in a row there too, but Frida was none the worse, nor her father either. She got a husband and he got the capital to start Hector Damm & Co.

I remember writing to you about the governor's letter when you married, the usual slobber about your disgraceful and reckless act breaking your mother's heart. I kept that letter and I read it to you and Elinor in your bedroom at Dieppe the first night after you and she arrived from America. I'd come to spend the summer holidays, and as soon as I got there, they told me they were expecting you. The governor came over on the Saturday and brought the cable saying you were arriving by the French boat at Havre on the Monday. I was awfully excited and so were the girls ; all of us were fearfully impatient to see

you both. Mother didn't seem to care much one way or the other, but the governor went about looking as though he was going to be hanged and warned me I wasn't to tell anybody till they'd seen what Elinor was like. I didn't know what he imagined but from the way he spoke he might have been expecting her to arrive in tights and a bathing suit with "whore" embroidered in scarlet letters on her tummy.

The governor and I were standing together at the extreme end of the quay as the liner slowly came in and the first glimpse I got of you was when you were quite close. You and Elinor were among a crowd of people and at first I couldn't see you. Then we caught sight of each other and waved and I saw you put your hand under her arm. She had on a light blue dress and a long blue veil and she was talking to a tall man with a black beard. You pulled her towards you and put your arm round her waist ; she looked up towards us and I saw you pointing us out to her. Even then she didn't wave or anything, just stood there hardly looking at us. That was characteristic. The governor dipped his flag the moment he saw her ; he became friendly in that sudden way of his and put his hand on my arm and squeezed it. "She is pretty, Tony, she is pretty and—she's shy, she's frightened. Look at her, she hardly dares look at us." His whole manner changed and he began to get excited and

quite jolly, took off his hat and waved it. As the ship got closer and closer, Elinor waved her handkerchief, and even at that first moment of seeing her, I noticed her expression as she looked at the governor; it was the sort of expression a girl at a restaurant with another chap puts on when she knows you've spotted her for a peach. Closer and closer. They throw the gangways across and here we are together. Elinor throws her long veil back over her hat, the governor kisses her on both cheeks, puts her arm in his, and you look beyond words delighted. They walk off to the Customs House and you and I follow. Do you remember my first words, Dick? I wasn't nineteen then but I couldn't have improved on them if I'd been forty. "That's all right but look out for mother." By Jove, that was pretty true, wasn't it?

Do you remember the train journey to Dieppe? I do, every minute of it. It wasn't till we four were sitting together that I got a proper chance of taking Elinor in. But she'd taken us in all right. She'd missed nothing. Those great brown eyes of hers watched and noted everything, the governor's tip to the guard to keep us the carriage, his cigarette-case, his gold matchbox and his amber tube. Ah! Elinor had all the equipment of an out-and-out winner but she always made a mess of it. I'd have backed her then till the cows came home. And yet there

was something I noticed, something under her smiles and her sweetness, something about her mouth. Goodness knows she was pretty enough, long lashes, heavy eyelids, olive complexion with just the right touch of colour, a perfect dress-maker's figure, tiny narrow feet, beautifully turned out, in fact, not a flaw in the picture except that mouth. It wasn't exactly an ugly mouth, but it was wrong; it was a hard mouth.

The governor soon dropped off as he always did, and we three talked in whispers. I held her thin pointed hand and asked her who gave her the three rings. She told me they had been sent to her by mother—to New Orleans; I said they were rotten. I don't think she had thought them rotten till then, but, after I said that, I knew she did. They weren't bad really, diamond, emerald and sapphire hoops. We couldn't talk much for fear of waking him, but I told her something about mother and explained that she and the governor and the girls had the annexe and we three had rooms next each other in the hotel. Before I could tell her half what I wanted to, he woke up and he looked at Elinor and rubbed his eyes and looked at her again. He was pulling himself together. Then he lit a cigarette and rolled his eyes once or twice; I wondered what was coming but he seemed to think better of it and said nothing. The governor never could say

anything until he'd worked himself up. He began asking her questions about the States, whether it was very hot when you left and whether the boat was crowded. While she was telling him about some Italian Count on board and what a beast his American wife was, the train pulled up in Dieppe station and in another minute John was at the door and we were handing him the bags. Mother was waiting in the carriage. I didn't see the meeting because the governor sent me with John to see after your luggage and come on with it but I can imagine you four now, driving away like Royalties, mother and Elinor in the back seat and you and the governor facing them, turning into the courtyard of the Royal.

By the time I got there you were all having tea. Helen and George Hayes were there and Ada and Olivia. Percy Macfarlane and the two Bulmers had turned up with the girls after playing tennis at the Casino ; it must have struck Elinor as rather a brilliant gathering. Those soft brown eyes of hers must have rested a moment on the silver dish in the ante-room full of cards. There was a big colony of Roumanians and *rastas* that year, most of whom were princes and there were the usual masses of flowers and that way mother had of suffusing a place with an air of luxury. I can see her now sitting back in an arm-chair sipping her tea, you at her feet, gazing into her

eyes as though you could never take them off her, competing with poor old Curly, whose head was on your knees.

It all went well at first. Mother was very gracious, though Elinor, instead of going over and talking to her, immediately annexed one of those Bulmer fools, the one who afterwards married a chorus girl. After tea you wanted to stay with mother while the rest of us went back to the Casino. The governor disappeared; of course he'd gone to the Cercle Privé though he hadn't begun serious gambling in those days. Mother said she was tired and wanted to rest before dinner; you left her reluctantly but Elinor showed plainly she didn't intend to be left out of any fun that was going. I don't know exactly how much I saw then but I know I felt Elinor hadn't put herself out enough and wasn't going to, that she was beginning to miss chances.

The moment we got outside in the ante-room she said she must change her hat. You asked her what it mattered, couldn't she stay as she was until she dressed for dinner? Her answer wasn't over civil and the heavy eyes snapped at you. Of course, you gave way and we all three went over to the hotel. The girl's maid was unpacking Elinor's boxes, there must have been twenty hats on the bed. She began trying on one, then another. You went into the

dressings-room where John was unpacking your things and you slipped into flannel bags and shoes.

“Look at Richard, I mayn’t change my hat but look at him,” was her remark when you came in ; it sounded a shade nasty. It amused me watching you both. I could see your expression riled her, and when she said “Oh do go down and leave me with Tony,” I backed her up.

When we got downstairs we didn’t see you and we went into the annexe, but when we reached the salon mother was just getting up from her chair and you were helping her. She looked Elinor up and down as we stood in the doorway, thoroughly took in every detail of her perfectly thought-out toilette, turned round and went slowly into her bedroom with Curly at her heels while you held the door open. Elinor watched you close the door and looked at me ; when we laughed, you looked annoyed.

Afterwards you said mother had told you about Helen’s engagement, and then had spoken very nicely about Elinor, had remarked how pretty she was, and said she hoped to love her as her own daughter. I had no illusions about that, when mother looked at her, there was disapproval written all over her face. Mother wasn’t the kind to accept a daughter-in-law who was out for herself first, last and all the time.

While you and the girls and the rest played tennis, Elinor and I watched ; I always hated getting hot and rushing about. Helen and George sat with us for a time, but I never said a word to them, you know what Helen's conversation was like. They soon got up and walked away and I told Elinor how mother managed to get her engaged and what a lucky job it was. She said you'd hardly ever mentioned Helen. No wonder.

We talked a lot after that and got on awfully well. I told her as much as I could about everyone, calling a spade a spade. It was understood that my information was confidential, especially you weren't to know. I knew you'd butter her up with all sorts of fairy tales, and I thought the sooner she knew the rights of things the better. They would have turned out the same anyhow, but perhaps my telling her so soon made them go quicker . . . and I did warn her to play doggo to mother. I meant well by her, but I knew at once the sort she was ; she wasn't one to be fooled about some things. She knew mother had lovers as soon as she set eyes on her and that the governor was an old rip. What was the use of bolstering them up ? And she jolly soon tumbled to the essential—money, of course. I told her as much as I knew about that and that everything would always turn on it so far as she was concerned. She could see for herself what it

cost to live in that sort of way. You remember they had a dining-room as well as a salon in the annexe. That first night we must have been fifteen to dinner at least, someone or other always turned up besides the habitués like Percy and the Bulmers and it's obvious that can't be done for nothing in a place like the Royal in the height of the season. I told her too about the winter in the South, they'd only just started that, and gave her a general idea of the sort of life her parents-in-law lived. By the time you'd finished your tennis, she knew quite a lot more than she had before and her eyes got larger and larger.

We filled in some of the gaps that night when we talked in your room ; we didn't go to bed till three. It was then I pulled out the letter the governor wrote after he got the cable which came from that American doctor announcing your marriage. You were shirty with me for reading that letter, why, I couldn't see. You admitted yourself that you had told her they would be awfully cut up and anyhow it was all over then and she was making good running with the governor. He was frightfully nice to her at dinner and afterwards too, told her how lucky you were to have found such a charming and, he was sure, such a good little wife and he hoped you'd be worthy of her.

You never noticed her expression when you began telling her how sweet the girls were and how happy you were to be with them all again. I'd been talking to her about Ada's affair with Percy and Olivia's with Hugh Bulmer. Of course you never saw anything but she soon twigged. For you, they were both innocent misses in the school-room, though as a matter of fact, girls in the schoolroom aren't any more innocent than boys, and there's not much innocence about them if I was a sample. How many years did it take you to learn something about girls? I was nineteen and you were twenty-two and married over a year. You ought to have learnt something by then. It was some time while we were at Dieppe she told me all about your early married life at New Orleans and how you wanted to fight a duel with an old Southern General because he put his hand on her knee. Oh, crikey cockalorum! We got on to the subject of Uncle Fred after that, she was as keen as mustard to know all about him. The Lord knows what you'd told her about him, but anyhow she knew he was one to get the right side of, that he'd got the stuff. I did my best to put her on and when he came over that next Saturday, he was all over her as I told her he would be. She got him placed all right after that.

Late as it was that night I lay awake a long time thinking things over. I knew there was some-

thing to be done if only we played the game right but I was afraid you'd muck it up with your silly sentimentality about them all. What I wanted was a sort of unholy alliance between us three. We swore one before we parted that first night but I didn't mean the same as you did. I was always more of a realist than you. I never was troubled with all that my-eye about conscience and duty. All I was thinking about at the moment was how things could be worked so that we three could come out on top. I wasn't in the least bothering about past troubles as you always did, they were over and done with. What if I had been sacked from Eton, so were Fitzroy and heaps of other chaps, some of the very best, even some of the cleverest for that matter. And the slip-up at Bonn didn't weigh on me either. As for the Hamburg row, all I felt was that Uncle Fred had no business to poke his nose into my affairs. What business was it of his if I had pleasant company down below there on the ground floor. Dear old Emma wouldn't have minded my keeping her husband's ghost warm ; in fact I nearly told her before Uncle Fred came. While you were jawing away to me about my making a fresh start and learning all about the Damm's shipping business so that I should get on the right side of the governor, I was wondering how soon I could cut the whole show and clear out of Copenhagen before old Damm

tumbled to what was going on between Frida and me.

The one thing Elinor wanted was for you to go into the business ; she made that clear enough and of course she was right, as far as it went. I knew you weren't keen on it yourself, but she worked you up to it and you said you were. While we were talking about it, I was considering whether I'd work for or against it. On the whole, it seemed the best thing for us all three. It wasn't that I was jealous. I wanted you to make good but I didn't see why I should be out of it. I didn't want you to get too far ahead, and I wasn't certain enough of how much stickfast there was in Elinor. I knew your doing any good depended on her. She could run you as she pleased, and if you got solid with the governor and Uncle Fred, I might be left out in the cold. All the same, I decided for it and tackled the governor the next morning when he was writing his usual Sunday letters to the aunts.

He began by starting that piffle about your not having any taste for business and perhaps being more cut out for the bar or "one of the learned professions." I said it was too late for that.

"Why too late? He can go to Oxford now and take his degree."

"How can he now he's married?" I asked.

"All the better" was his answer. "She'll

keep him out of mischief. I believe Elinor's got a head on her shoulders."

At all events Elinor had head enough to stop that sort of jabber. I think you can imagine what she said when I revealed the governor's Oxford scheme to her. I put her right about it that afternoon before she went for a drive with mother. I told her the line to take, that what she wanted was for you to stand on your own legs and be independent and that your weak point always was that you never could resist a new idea and if they proposed Oxford to you, you'd take it up and chuck it after a few months. Whereas you were dead set on going into the business and if they put you into it she'd take care that you stuck to it.

I don't know what happened during the drive but the governor and Elinor had a talk after dinner while you and mother played *béziq*ue and she told me it was all arranged, and that as soon as you were settled, she'd work for me in any way I wanted. I hadn't made up my mind exactly what to do ; I wasn't keen on being stuck in an office. Of course, what I wanted was a decent allowance and to do what I pleased but it wasn't any use playing for that straight ; one had to find some sort of blooming alias. On the whole I thought saying I'd try for the diplomatic service would be as good as anything. I could speak German about as well as English, and

France for a time was all right, if it wasn't too far from Paris.

You were awfully pleased that Elinor and I were getting on so well together but I wonder what you'd have said then if you'd known all this.

II

WHILE the preparations for Helen's wedding were going on in London, the roof fell in at Copenhagen and back I came. I must say the governor behaved very well over that ; whatever their faults were, he and Uncle Fred knew something about women. My youth saved me that time, it's a pity it didn't last long enough to save me later on. I got to London just in time for the wedding. Do you remember George Hayes' relations, that old father with the bit of chin-whisker and the mother's green silk dress, and how Elinor got you up so that everybody took you for the bridegroom ? And the way Elinor turned up her nose at the women's dresses ? No one was good enough for her. I must say she was far and away the smartest woman at the wedding, but she couldn't help showing she knew it and she put all their backs up. She was bitterly jealous of Helen's wedding and Helen's presents, and of Helen being the centre of the picture. Fancy a little beauty like that being jealous of poor old Helen ! She didn't think she was being made enough of. So she made up to the governor and got squeezed behind the library door by Uncle

Fred and in consequence was getting more and more disliked by mother even at that early day. You were to have stayed on until they bought you a house but mother had her knife in, and we know what that meant. She very soon found that furnished one in Onslow Gardens and Elinor and you were shot out. You little knew you were shot out for good.

“ I don't intend to have that American woman living in the same house with me again, William.” Those were mother's words to the governor the evening after you left. It would have been a bit of a shock to you if you'd heard. You thought all that only came afterwards through your own fault. Wrong again, as usual. The governor did his best to calm her down about Elinor ; he knew mother's dictatorial ways and at that time he was Elinor's partisan. Do you remember how he used at first to go and fetch you to take you to the City in his hansom ? I suppose he didn't say so to you but he was rather shocked when he found Elinor was never up. That was retailed back, of course. You used to dine at Ennismore Gardens fairly often, but mother took care only to invite you with the family or when the elect weren't there, and when it got past eleven, I can hear her saying : “ Don't you think, Elinor, it's time you went home. Richard has to be at the office before ten, and that means such an early breakfast for you, doesn't it, dear ? ”

Elinor never concealed her contempt for the Onslow Gardens house ; it was rather a jolly little place really, but she said it was a scandal for them to expect you and her to live in it. I said something to mother about finding you a better house.

“ So she’s not satisfied ? I suppose she thinks your father ought to give her one in Mayfair and twenty thousand a year. She happens to be his daughter-in-law, not his wife,” was all I got. I broke it gently to Elinor the morning afterwards.

You’d gone to the City looking quite pleased with yourself ; you hadn’t an idea then of what was going on, and whenever I tried to tell you, you shut me up. What could I do but try to put Elinor on her guard ? But she burst into a furious rage ; it was the first time I’d seen her really angry and it took my breath away. She was in bed and she thumped the pillows until I felt sorry for them. Now I come to think of it in the light of subsequent history it’s extraordinary how you managed to hide her temper from people. I’d never heard more than a rumble, this was an eruption.

“ They keep us boxed up in this rotten little hole while they spend thousands ; she’s jealous of me, that’s all it is. You wait. I’ll make them whistle for this ” and so on.

And I dare say she could have if she’d had a

different sort of husband to you, one who would have seen that the one thing to do was to sit tight and accumulate like Uncle Fred. I reminded her that you were making a share of the commissions.

"A fat lot of good that does us," she snapped. "He isn't to touch that, it's got to be saved and meanwhile he won't go to restaurants and hardly ever to a theatre because he says we can't afford it, and I have to drive about in cabs while they've got a stable full of horses."

I suggested doing it on tick and you were frightfully stuffy about it at first. But she was wild to go out and a day or two later we had supper at the Savoy and you got tight. You used to get tight awfully easy in those days, I never could understand why, considering you'd been used to American bars and cocktails. Then mother went away for the winter, stopping in Paris for a few weeks; I told Elinor it was to get clothes.

"While I haven't a rag," she said.

She was in a constant state of angry resentment about everything. She sneered at all of us going to the station to see mother off, the arrival at the station in the brougham, the reserved carriage, John and her maid, flowers, the governor, Uncle Fred and Benda escorting her as far as Cannon Street, the old ceremony. It was a ridiculous fuss, she said, and everyone was a fool. She let off her

steam to me, she knew that mother was the one subject she had to draw the line at where you were concerned.

Anyhow, mother's departure left Elinor a bit more rope to hang you and herself with. She managed to keep a hold on the governor. Between her and me, how I don't quite know, we got him to hand her over some cash to pay your bills with. She didn't tell him that your debts were for dinners and suppers she made you have at the Savoy and for her fal-lals. After that he told you he would entrust your allowance to her, he was sure she was a better manager and that it would be in both your interests.

Amongst the people who filled up Ennismore Gardens for Helen's wedding was old Nanny. Up to the end I was fonder of old Nanny than of anyone in the world except the boy and you. I don't know whether I was born without an affectionate disposition, whether I squandered it by the corrupt excesses of early youth, or whether life taught me that affectionate professions don't in any way prevent the professors doing all they can to spoil your life and do you in the eye. At that time I didn't know all that. I loved that old woman because she loved me and would never believe I wasn't the same dear little boy whose curls she rolled with her own fingers and then said they were natural. She and I had long jaws together about the family, in the housekeeper's

room. You came down one evening and introduced Elinor to her but Nanny didn't fancy her. Elinor didn't have the right manner though she tried hard.

One evening Nanny suddenly said "I wonder what the master will do about Miss Helen at the register."

I pricked up my ears. "What d'you mean, Nanny?" I asked.

At first she wouldn't explain but after a time, and after making me swear I'd never give her away, she told me that Helen was born before mother married the governor and wasn't his daughter. She said she didn't know who her father was, all she knew was "Miss Helen isn't your proper sister" which she repeated over and over again. She refused to tell me how she knew and the only information I could get out of her was that my cousin Maggie knew the rights of it if anyone did, but she'd never tell me nor ought she herself to have told me what she had, "but it just came out like, before she knew what she was saying."

It's a funny thing, but I wasn't really surprised. It was like something I'd always more or less taken for granted without exactly knowing. Although the governor always called Helen Sissy, we never did. As soon as we were old enough, we called her Helen and we never gave her a nickname. We seemed to feel she was different

from us ; we never counted her in and it wasn't just because she was a sneak, nor because she was so stupid. We hardly teased her even, it didn't seem worth while, and when we came home from St. Vincent's we never thought about her, only about Ada and Olivia, even when they were too small to play games with us.

But although I wasn't surprised, as I turned it over in my mind, it became more important. I knew that Nanny would never have said what she did unless she knew and it was a sort of proof that I had been right when I felt that the governor and mother were no better than I was and that all the governor's self-righteous talk was cant. I was surer than I had ever been that all that really matters is to have plenty of money. Then you can do what you like and no one blames you for anything. I made up my mind that, for once, I'd keep what Nanny told me to myself ; later on that bit of information might come in useful.

I wanted awfully to tell you, I never liked keeping anything from you and I should have loved to talk it over, but I was certain you would have been in an awful stew about it and very likely you'd have gone off to mother and told her and spoilt any chance there was of making use of it, besides getting poor old Nanny into a fearful row and losing her her pension. That was the worst of you in those days ; you had a sickening goody-goody side. You always believed people were

what they pretended to be. But after all I couldn't help telling Elinor, making her swear by all the gods that she wouldn't say a word to you and it was arranged between us that no steps should be taken about it without our both agreeing.

III

ABOUT eighteen months later you were in the flat in Hanover Square. You were going to the City every day but you were utterly weary of it and more or less ill. You looked like nothing on earth and you and Elinor were living a dog and cat life. But you wouldn't admit it. You always made out you were on the best of terms and that the everlasting jangles were just little connubial tiffs. After the winter at Onslow Gardens you had the idiotic idea of taking a dear little house in the country for the summer where Elinor twiddled her thumbs all day looking forward to her hubby's return in the evening and a little light gardening by way of delectable amusement. For society and diversion she had the boring wives of one or two local nonentities and invitations to tea and tennis which she didn't play. Meanwhile the dominant powers had been disporting themselves in the South where thanks to their general lavishness and to their manner of life, mine wasn't closely looked into nor that of my coach Raoul d'Hassonville, recommended by my pal of the Corinthians, George Ellis, Editor of the *Capitol Review*. Meanwhile also, mother was

moving the family establishment into Mayfair where the governor had been running another, under the rose, for some time. Of these matters you knew nothing or next to nothing but it was less pardonable that, although you were going to the office every day like a nice self-respecting young man earning a living for himself and his dear little wife, you were ignorant until I informed you that the firm were making money hand over fist. You might still have considered it quite suitable and proper to continue living on your allowance, especially as you were generously allowed to save but not draw (i.e. the money was credited in the books of the firm) the quixotically extravagant proportion of twenty per cent of the commission you earned yourself. But Elinor, to whom I imparted these various glad tidings, saw it in a different light.

I must say that was an uncommonly cosy flat of yours. I turned up there unannounced one foggy November afternoon and found Elinor with that pretty little witch, Gerty, who had chucked Musical Comedy and was playing it up as Lady John Dunglass. She was fearfully excited about my affair with Liane de Pougy, the trouble was I couldn't keep that simmering without money and where was it to come from? But money had to be found, and how, was the question. I didn't want to say too much before Gerty, and then you turned up. You were

awfully pleased to see me and after we'd yarned a bit I saw that the worm was beginning to turn.

That night we thrashed it all out. If I couldn't convince you that the time had come to strike for something better, Elinor could and did. She worked you up finely and then I sprang the Helen business on you. Of course you said you didn't believe it, I might have known you'd say that.

While I'd been away, Elinor had made friends with Maggie, the sort of thing women call friendship. The very next day, off she went to her and gave the whole show away without saying a word to me. She got nothing out of Maggie, but our charming cousin promptly blew on her to mother. You know the rest. I did all I could to make you let Elinor bear the consequences. That time I really did my best for you; the governor had told me that if only you'd give him a chance he'd get you free from her, but nothing moved you. You were determined to stand by Elinor.

Two or three days later you had the interview with mother and the governor. How Elinor ever screwed you up to it I can't imagine, you must have been a pretty sick man. I'm glad I wasn't there to witness your ignominious defeat. You had nothing to say, you were beaten the moment you found yourself facing mother. It ended, as I might have known it would end, by your

There and

abjectly imploring her to forgive you. Mother wasn't soft like you ; she knew the sort of woman she had to deal with and the terms were what you know. You were down and out and in the wilderness until the day of her death.

Even that wouldn't have mattered so much to me. The mess that fool Elinor made of the whole thing certainly was bad enough and your taking up the gloves for her was worse. But worst of all was your going about like a whipped cur, taking the whole thing lying down as though it had been your doing. You never even had a shot at making terms, you accepted the governor's miserable settlement and went to Switzerland ready to stay there for the rest of your life. You even told me you'd be glad to if Elinor would and that you asked nothing better than to live abroad and give yourself up to literature. It makes me sick even now when I call to mind a letter you wrote me full of the most awful tosh about dear old Jacquelin's grave in the cemetery at Vevey, how you'd always felt you'd be drawn back there where you'd been so happy as a boy and how some bloody Russian had written a wonderful book there and perhaps you might do something of the same kind. While you were mooning about with snow mountains on your brain, Elinor was writing me that she'd had just about as much as she could stand of it and if something didn't happen soon, she'd hop it ; I expect she meant she'd go

tarting in Paris. Summer came and you went to Ouchy. Of course you didn't know the reason your erudite friend Count Falkenberg you jawed German literature with, didn't go to Bohemia. I heard all about Elinor and him at Baden Baden where I'd gone for the races.

Soon after that, mother died. As you know, they'd turned me down by then and the governor never even wrote to me. When you came through Paris, you looked like a corpse and I was jolly glad I was an outcast and I had an extra bottle of pop for dinner with Johnny Dunglass on the strength of it.

The next time I saw you was in Brussels. You had very much changed. You didn't seem to care what you did or what Elinor did. And yet you kept up the same pretence of your being a devoted couple. Of course I knew at once Gaston was her lover, everyone except you would have known it. Do you remember my turning up from Paris and finding you in the Parc? I literally hadn't a bob. The affair with Liane was still going on. I was staying with Sergius Belsky but he was beginning to get tired of lending me money and I hoped you could find me a bit or join with me in raising some from a Brussels usurer, but you were sticky as usual. Gaston did his best for me as soon as he knew I'd tumbled to his affair with Elinor and wasn't going to give him away. But that fat Belgian money-lender

wasn't taking any and all I got was Gaston's old family ticker and jewellery to pawn. What a hell of a dust Elinor kicked up about that. It was then she raked up the Bonn story and you believed her version of it.

That American at Bonn was an utter black-guard; he gave me his blooming ring and of course I sold it and he only got nasty when I turned his disgusting propositions down. Elinor knew that was the truth, but she was down on me because I'd seen through her little affair with Gaston and she was afraid I should give her away. It was you all over to take her word against mine. I may have been a liar but Elinor was Ananias and Sapphira rolled into one. Anyhow you and Corbett between you found me a *mille* and I made ten more out of it at chemmy that same evening and paid you back.

By the way, Corbett was another of Elinor's fancy young men but he was some good. If only you'd have let me talk straight to you, I'd have told you to get out on him then, it was as easy as shelling peas. He was burning hot and I did my best to get him to bolt with her, told him she would if he asked her. I don't know what stopped him; it might have been because I couldn't help giving Gaston the tip that he'd got a rival. I know Corbett went away soon afterwards. That was the second time I tried to save you though I was at the end of my own tether.

A short time after that you went to Biarritz and I came my first real big mucker. I don't remember how much it cost the governor that time, but the best terms I could make included my beating it to Australia.

Mir
Ghulam Ahmad Mir

IV

OF your various phases I have always thought your sporting country-life the rottenest. No one could be less fitted for that rôle than you, and I never could explain to myself how Elinor brought herself to give way to it. From her point of view there was nothing to be got out of it except acute boredom. It was bound to throw you back upon each other's society just at a time when you were utterly sick of each other and the only hope of keeping the farce of your married life up was to be amongst people. Your love of hunting was, as you soon discovered, largely imaginary and, like everything else, you jolly soon got through it. It couldn't be otherwise.

That sort of life has to be in the blood and goes with a whole lot of other tastes and conventions and prejudices that are foreign to you. Because you rode well as a boy and had done a bit of hunting at odd times and had a go at ranching in Canada, you took it into your head that you could live in a stable and go piddling about after a stinking little fox for the rest of your life. You must have been pretty innocent not to realise that men like us could only stand hunting in the

very best country, having the very best horses, doing everything in the most slap-up way, in a big house with plenty of pretty women about, card parties in the evening and running up to town three times a week. The sort of people who stick in the country all the year round except for a fortnight in town in what they call the season, so that they can get two days with a provincial pack and spend the rest of their time cadging for a day's shooting with Lord Tomnoddy, doing odd jobs or ratting and playing village cricket on Saturdays, and whose wives' only excitement are local tennis, selling at bazaars and being asked once a year to the Duchess of Doodle's garden party, aren't the kind you and I have much in common with. Of the benighted bumpkins who live in the country the best are respectable bores, magistrates and local swelled-heads, who think of nothing but their own self-importance; the others are the pettiest, the most snobbish and intolerable time-servers and noodles alive. Not one in fifty of the well-to-do so-called country gentlemen are country gentlemen at all; they're mere *parvenus* masquerading as landed aristocracy. They're either in business themselves or their fathers were, and their families have no more to do with the land than ours has. Country life in the old sense, when a man got his income from rents and farming his own land and really did belong to the soil, died fifty years ago. The

whole thing is a sham, as big a sham as its bulwark the church, where they go on Sundays and sing hymns, believing in it about as much as I do. The sound of the church bells in the country makes me sicker even than hearing the abominable noise made by cocks and hens and cows and sheep. They, at least, have the excuse of making that row because they want to be fed and no one has to live near them if they don't like it. But you can't get away from those damned bells. Of course, I'm everything a decent country gentleman abominates. That doesn't worry me. They can go on being sportsmen and playing their games, I prefer playing my own. I don't see why I'm a rotter for pleasing myself and, incidentally, giving a good time to anyone who wants to share my tastes, and why they're heroes because they spend their lives hitting a ball into a hole with a stick.

There is another type of man who grinds all his days to make a fortune so that he can become a Lord Burcott, like Anderson, or a Viscount Yarrow, like Furnival. It's only another way of looking at life. They want to be thought a lot of and to found a family ; to me all that isn't worth while. Of course, everyone needs money, a man who can't pay his way is always a rotter, or a waster, or an outsider, whichever term you prefer.

You knew all this as well as I did ; better, perhaps, and yet during those evenings I spent

mostly talking to you I couldn't get you to say anything. You didn't answer when I jawed. You just listened and said nothing, though I saw from your face that you didn't think everything I said was rot, as everybody else would have. You gave me the feeling that you were playing some sort of game, that you were out for an experience or something. All I could get out of you was that you got on very well with the farmers and that you liked the labourers. You couldn't have had much to do with the labourers except with that old codger you were always foregathering with, the one who looked after the pigs and chickens.

When I came back from Australia with Nancy and the boy you were in the thick of it at Lyncroft. I came down to stay with you for a week and you were behaving as if you liked it and you were doing what you've always done. You cast yourself for a part and played up to it like an artist—until you got sick of it. You fetched me at the station with a pair of spanking roan hacks ; both, you assured me, had taken prizes at different horse-shows and one of them had been the property of a duchess. Whether this added to its value or not I didn't know but the honour had evidently been too much for the beast, for I gathered that it developed glanders shortly after you bought it. The moment I'd swallowed my tea, I had to go round the stables. You, in

common with everybody who has horses, or gardens, or children, think that other people ought to admire them as much as you do. You made me go into a number of loose-boxes where I was terrified of being kicked and as there were nearly twenty hunters, besides hacks and ponies and you told me the history, age and breeding of each one of them, I got tired and bored. As I was only just back from the other end of the world and had not seen you for nearly two years, I tried to hide my boredom, but all the time you were showing me round I was saying to myself: "So this is the new game. How much for the little horse-coping gent, riding-bags and leggings all complete. I'll start him at a tanner, gentlemen, going, going, gone."

You were running the damned horses on a sort of partnership arrangement with some Irish scamp who called himself a major, the idea being they were to pay. I did you the justice not to suppose you believed that and that it was a blind to get the old man to put up the cash. You told me your hunting cost you nothing. I dare say, but it cost the governor a pound or two, though it was doubtless cheaper for him than something else might have been, Liane for example.

At dinner you wore an impossible stock satin bow and a red coat that set my teeth on edge and I noticed you'd taken to drinking port, a rotten drink; you'd taken a lot of old landed

stuff over with the place, you said. Elinor wasn't overjoyed to see me. She was by way of making the running in county society, had been asked to dinner by Lady Alfriston and, doubtless, she thought I should be detrimental.

Alfredo Boncampagni, who was always going to buy horses from you and never did, was staying with you and so was Lady Beatrice Poole, with whom you were apparently having a feeble sort of flirtation. Elinor was awfully sick with her because she put grease on her hands at night and spoilt her best spare-room eiderdown. Elinor had picked up Alfredo at the Hopes' and he was obviously mashed. On the whole I suppose he was the most faithful of all her devotees, except George Cole-Sutton, who was to turn up later and whom Elinor said she couldn't stand the sight of. But she always said that when she was discarding for a better hand. She warmed up later on and told me Alfredo had invited you to Coneglio and what a dear he was and primed me with the sort of things she wanted me to say to him about her when I got the chance. She told me about his being almost engaged to Ethel Hope in the summer and how she cut her out. That was one of Elinor's tricks. She was awfully pleased with herself for getting you to step into Alfredo's place and take Ethel up the river. The comical part was that you were cut up because you thought you'd compromised Ethel with

Alfredo. That was too good to keep to myself ; I had to tell Alfredo about it one night and I laughed so loud going up the stairs that Beetle opened her door and asked me what it was all about and I had to go in and tell her too. It was perfectly true about the grease, she'd got gloves on, but she took them off after a time and other things besides. I couldn't tell you that, but when I hinted to you that she was pretty thick you got your shirt out. I saw quite a lot of her in town afterwards.

The first evening we were all pretty quiet and sober. I had a serious moment, having come down to tell you all about Nancy and the boy and to talk over what I was going to do. I wanted to know what you were thinking about life, after nearly two years that I'd been at the antipodes, and whether, which seemed to me impossible, you really intended living in the country. You'd only been there a short time and I couldn't believe it would last. I wondered if I couldn't get you to chuck it and go into the governor's business with me. Though he would have had me in, Uncle Fred wouldn't at any price, but you and Uncle Fred were on good terms ; in fact, he was supplying a good part of your income and I hoped I might get round him through you. I knew Elinor would be keen enough, but the governor hadn't forgiven her and that might be a stumbling-block.

You and I had a long talk after the others had gone to bed. I told you how I met Nancy and made up my mind to marry her, partly because I'd compromised her and partly because I saw it was the only way to make good with the governor after all that had happened. Sure enough, as soon as the boy was old enough to travel, the old man sent for us and for the first time in my life I really intended to play the game up to a point. I say up to a point, because under no circumstances could I have been satisfied to live a cheek-by-jowl life with Nancy. To begin with, she bored my soul out of me and, if you'd ever been in Australia, you'd know that no woman from there could ever be anything but middle-class and provincial. The so-called gentry have got the country parson type of mind and Nancy had the stereotyped, puritanical, hypocritical notions of a nicely brought up vicar's daughter.

I told you all this and a good deal more but you weren't as frank about yourself. I couldn't get you to tell me what you were really thinking and I was certain something was brewing in your mind. You had a library full of books at Lyn-croft and, apparently, you read a good deal; I saw masses of papers and periodicals. You were keen about politics and seemed to know a good deal about them. But though you were ready to do anything you could to help me, you turned

down any idea of business for yourself and said nothing would induce you to go back to it. You said you were reconciled to being a country bumpkin, it was better than knocking about the Continent and you hated London. You still obstinately refused to say a word about Elinor that wasn't more or less creditable to her. It simply beat me, because any fool could see that your life with her was the emptiest of husks. It was an obsession. You've always been subject to obsessions; Myrtle became one afterwards.

The morning after I told Alfredo and Beetle about you and the Hope girl, I got a surprise. We all had breakfast in bed except you. Of course the squire, or whatever you believed you were, had to sit down to it in the orthodox way. It happened to be Sunday so I suppose the servants went to church and you didn't read prayers—good Lord! I'd got on a lovely brown suit, a bow tie to match, a mauve silk shirt and very thin brown shoes. I wandered downstairs but though it was twelve o'clock, there was nobody about. I poked my nose outside the front door which was open. It was late March or early April, there had been a frost and as it was hard under foot and I shouldn't soil my shoes, I went out for a stroll.

By some strange magnetism my steps led me down a longish drive and an avenue to a small gate, beyond which there was a path between

clipped yews. I strolled down that and found myself suddenly standing outside a church door through which I could hear singing. The door was ajar and I looked in. A lot of snivelling, greasy-headed little boys and girls looked up with the vacant curiosity of their breed and I went in and sat down in a pew, as far from them as possible. It was a miserable little church, covered all over with those depressing marble tablets marked with names of the dead, and there weren't more than thirty people in it. Up in front, on one side of what I believe is called an aisle, I could see the back of your head and an awful flamingo-coloured hat which I knew belonged to Beetle. On the other, I could see the profile of a lady whose head was enveloped in daffodils and next her a girl decorated in the same style. They seemed to have taken the flowers out of some vases on the communion table, for they were of the same kind, in fact the whole church was full of them. Perhaps it was Easter, I rather think it was. Well, there you were, singing hymns. You turned your head, I suppose you were admiring the daffodil ladies, and I saw your lips move. A minute later I skedaddled. When I got back to Lyncroft, I found Alfredo lying on the sofa in the boudoir outside Elinor's bedroom, eating *marrons-glacés* and looking at *the Sporting and Dramatic*.

“Where do you think Richard is?” I asked.

Elinor heard and poked her head and bare shoulders outside her door, then opened it a bit wider so that she could show herself in her chemise. "At church, of course," she answered, "and Beetle, too. Did you see the Alfristons?"

"I suppose they're the daffodillies. So it is the rule, is it?"

"Rather. Lady Alfriston means him to be churchwarden."

Elinor sneered, Alfredo laughed and she went back to finish her dressing.

What you'd taken that line for I didn't pretend to know but you were going through with it for a time. Till then I'd been fool enough to think that, whatever you might take Beetle on for, it wouldn't be as a partner in psalm-singing.

In the afternoon the parson came to tea—in his soutane. I know that kind. High Church, Confessional and the rest of it. It gives them a lot the best of the weights with the village maidens.

V

ONE of the most interesting episodes of our shining lives was the family reconciliation and be-happy-ever-after reunion. The governor's well-meaning idea was to bury the hatchet in mother's grave and to give us all a good launch into the Sea of Love. He little knew his family or those who had married into it. You always said the old man loved to be humbugged. He did, and I obliged him as much as I could, but he loved much more to humbug himself. He tried to believe us what he wanted us to be. He gave you and me up early in the action but he never gave up the girls and assured himself on this occasion that their mere presence would ensure a Summer Idyll.

At that time the firm was making so much money that it didn't make much difference to him what he spent. He and Uncle Fred had forked out to start you as a sort of country gentleman and me as a stock-jobber, both of us had pretty handsome allowances. Ada was running the establishments in London and the South pretty much as she liked and Olivia was to get a substantial settlement when she married.

Ada, with her usual regardlessness of expense, had discovered one of the largest, the most comfortable and certainly the ugliest house on the river. It was divided into apartments each of which had its own bathroom and so on. There were tennis and croquet and squash courts, boats, punts, canoes and a launch. In addition to the family horses and equipages, Olivia had her hack and you brought two ponies and a very smart Morgan cart painted in Elinor's favourite turquoise blue and black, with rubber tyres and pig-skin seats. Everything was as nice as could be, the party consisting of the entire existing family with two aspirants to the honour of membership, namely Herbert Trent who was hanging on to Ada and Leslie who was semi-officially engaged to Olivia. Elinor turned up attended by Alfredo with George Cole-Sutton looming in the background and Joe Walmsley staying with the people in the old house next to the church. I think I remember Cyril Fanshawe too, mooning about unable to believe his ears and eyes. How sweet we all were—at first.

"Do you want to use the large punt, Elinor dear? Oh certainly, I'll get the cushions, don't you trouble, dear. It's lovely under the shade of the trees on the left bank a little higher up."

"Oh I see, Ada, you and Bertie are going to play croquet. Never mind, Leslie and I will play tennis. Leslie's longing for a good sweat."

" I'm so sorry I had no idea you were playing billiards with Joe. We'll have a game of ping-pong, we love ping-pong don't we, darling ? "

" Might I have the launch this afternoon, do you think ? "

" Of course, Tony dear, why need you ask ? "

I didn't ask twice.

You took Nancy and the boy out for drives in the cart and she thought you the most delightful brother-in-law in the world. I think, but I'm not sure, that was the beginning of the trouble. I seem to remember someone repeating a remark at lunch about the pretty woman with the little boy driving behind the Connemara pony that Richard Kurt had entered for the Windsor Horse Show. Can't you see Elinor's face ? Or it might have been something I said to Ada about Trent being out a devil of a long time in the punt with Elinor.

Elinor was a sure draw with the other women but, whatever it was, the band soon began playing out of tune and once it went to pieces, it couldn't be got together again. We split into sides, each of which took it in turns to fight one of the others. Sometimes two sides made an alliance against a third, sometimes it was all against all. I never could remember with whom I was supposed to be quarrelling. One day Nancy and Olivia were sitting in each other's laps, the next day they weren't on speaking terms. On Friday Elinor

and Ada were off arm-in-arm for a picnic with Bertie Trent and Alfredo arm-in-arm behind them, on Saturday morning Elinor cut Alfredo dead, ordered you to take her up the river in the launch and Alfredo gloomily went up to pack his clothes for immediate departure. The same evening Elinor and her Italian disappeared immediately after dinner to reappear at midnight in the billiard-room, wreathed in smiles. I got a good deal of fun out of it, one way and another, but I don't think you did until Diana Campbell turned up. After that, we none of us saw much of you till you fell foul of the governor.

It was exactly your luck that you, who were about the only one who kept out of all the rows, should have been the one who came in for the worst one. Yet it was entirely your own fault. What did you want to get on your ear for about Diana with your "won't allow her name to be dragged in." The governor couldn't very well take your side against Alfredo's when you as good as told him to go to hell at your father's table. How you failed to see that it was all provoked by Elinor, I can't understand. Or did you see it, and was quarrelling with the governor only a get out for not saying something to her she wouldn't have liked? I'm not the sort to take a high line but I thought the old man behaved damned well. He knew Elinor was taking Alfredo on under your nose and was trying to put

herself right by showing you up with Diana. He tried to make it all pass off as chaff till you jumped in and made a drama out of it. As if it all mattered, as if I didn't have a show-down with Diana the evening after you took her back in the canoe. You always did think every woman you imagined yourself in love with, a Lucretia. You took things too seriously, life most of all, and you always got the worst of it. The governor never said of me what he did of you that night, "Your brother is a man it is best to avoid." If you had known he'd said that, you would have gone to him and implored him to take it back. As it was, after getting tight and falling into the backwater in your rage, you went up to his room and apologised.

Yip

VI

I NEVER forgot the expression on your face when your eyes fell on Ada and Stein and me sitting under the tree in the middle of the showing at Dublin watching you sell a horse. Lord, how I laughed ! You were sitting on the top of the most enormous beast I ever saw and you were shiny black and white all over, including the horse. You were wearing black and white check breeches, black boots and leggings and a grey hat, another chap in a grey hat was standing by the fence helping the deal. Afterwards you introduced him to us as Major O'Grady. He looked it. The chap you were selling the horse to didn't buy it. He was an Italian, with a beard, but he knew too much to buy that horse ; I suppose he didn't come from Italy for camels. You were rather sick when I ropped you about the deal not coming off, so I tried to sell your brute to Stein. He'd brought a novel with him and sat there under the tree reading it. Without lifting his eyes he said " I'm not entered for the Lord Mayor's Show " and went on reading.

You took Ada and me round and showed us your nags. You'd got all the patter, manners,

voice, leg-action, the whole business, it was a wonderful make-up. Taking it all together, I think it was your star turn and you took it so blooming seriously, you might have been brought up to it. I wonder what Myrtle would have thought of you then.

To the end of my life I never could understand what you did it for ; that was another of your mysteries. You didn't seem very pleased to see me, you asked me what I'd come to the Dublin Horse Show for and when I said " to see you," it riled you. I hadn't the slightest intention of coming when Ada suggested my joining the party on Thistleton's yacht, I loathe yachts and his wasn't any too big for the Irish Channel. But I thought it over in the light of my strong conviction that Thistleton wanted to get on the right side of the governor and I came to the conclusion that I might get something out of it.

The governor was very thick with Furnival and did all his financing for him. Thistleton was a company-promoting adventurer, his paper was all over the City, and I had reason for believing that if he didn't get on to something he could turn into bar-gelt pretty soon, he'd be up a gum-tree. The yacht was a blind, it looked and sounded rich but as he practically lived on it and when he was having a thin time, kept his crew waiting for their screw and lay at anchor

where there weren't any dues, it paid him. There was another side. A yacht's a place you can't get away from and people get so damned bored they'll do anything. He'd collar two or three chaps who had the stuff and get them to come for a cruise. Then he'd begin wheedling them, he was a plausible devil, and get them to come in on the ground floor in a Stock Exchange rig-up or some other swindle.

So I contributed Stein as well as myself to the party, the arrangement being a double one. If Thistleton had Stein, I got something, if Stein had him, I got something else. Stein was as rich as Croesus and they said he was mad. Perhaps he was, but he was sane enough to make half a million out of the Transvaal Trust, while Furnival, Thistleton and W. K. & Co. didn't make a quarter as much between them. He did the whole thing on promises while Furnival put up the cash. I got a thousand Founder's shares out of it. If I'd only kept them—what's the good of ifs?

Why Thistleton selected Dublin I don't know, perhaps he thought it would please Stein who drove a coach. I tried to work him to buy a team through you. I told him it was a good chance of getting the very best at a rock-bottom price because you were an old hand at the game and you wouldn't dream of making money out of a friend. He said "Of course not. Thanks very

much " and went on reading his book. After you'd shown him about six teams, and he'd been driven all over Dublin, he told me he thought it wouldn't be decent for him to sell the team he'd got ; he'd had them ten years and he'd got attached to them, so he thought he'd wait a little longer. You roared at that but the major didn't ; I wonder how much he and the Carey brothers expected to cut up over the deal.

Donnovan's party was a top-whole rag. If he was a sample of an Irish horse dealer, I didn't ask for better pals to have a razzle-dazzle with. You nearly spoilt it all, though, not wanting Ada to come, and then wanting her to go just as Donovan warmed up. He was nuts on Ada, he told me if he weren't married, she was just the touch for him. He didn't use that expression nor " broth of a girl," something at once rarer, more delicate, more Irish shall we say, but it won't bear repeating.

He looked like a huge bear ; he didn't dance, he stamped round on his enormous feet more or less in time with the music, making an infernal row and shaking the whole hotel. He held Ada with both hands round the waist and at every other stamp he twisted her round like a teetotum, clean off her feet. After a bit, the sweat was pouring off his face in a stream and as the evening wore on, he got drunker and drunker. When

Ada was exhausted he gave Mrs. Fotheringay a turn. She was as tall as Ada was short and more of a job to whirl, but he managed it. He whirled her horizontally instead of vertically, like a sort of scythe, mowing the other dancers down with her lanky extremities. What a rag !

Do you remember that polo player Arnott and his demure little wife ? What she thought of it all I don't know, but as soon as she turned up, you were all right. You took her under your wing while Arnott made up to the Fergusson girl whose dress split up the back. Donovan and I patched it with his red bandanna, she must have been black and blue in the morning where he pinched her. I don't know who it was put it into Donovan's head to get his brake out and drive us all down to Kingstown behind a team of hunters that had hardly been ever in harness before and never together. I should think no one on earth but he could have done it. When he got to the yacht, we were all mixed up ; Ada saw that the Fergusson girl was all right and I gave Arnott a suit of my clothes to have breakfast in. But you never told me what happened to Mrs. Arnott and I forgot to ask you. I expect you saw her safely home and bade her a chaste good morning on the doorstep.

The next morning there was a huge bouquet with a lace paper collar in the middle of the saloon table and a card the size of a court

invitation bearing an inscription to Ada on it, together with an invitation to the whole party to Killarney or Cork or wherever Castle Donovan was.

VII

IT must have been soon after Dublin that Leslie and Olivia went down to Lyncroft to stay with Elinor. There was a local horse show and theatricals. It was then you had one of your few open rows with Elinor and told her she was a "common little American fool." I wasn't there but the family repeated the sentence to each other every time they met, with relish. To atone for it, you began teaching Elinor to ride. Then she fell off and there was an end of that.

You were in an awful state even when you told me about it afterwards at the old club in Dover Street. Winkie Darrell and you and I were having a cocktail before going to Romano's where Dinny and another girl were to meet us and while you were describing the scene I was thinking how different you and I were.

The horse galloped back, you said, her body swayed backwards and forwards and she fell. She never moved afterwards. You tore back with your heart in your mouth, you were sure she was dead, that it was a judgment upon you for your wickedness, but when you jumped down and lifted her head, etcetera, etcetera.

Now if I'd been you, I should have been saying to myself "I wonder, oh I wonder, dare I hope, she's broken her bloody neck at last. I shall be a widower. I shall get all the credit for my sorrow. I'll have a nice dignified funeral. I'll be a nice dignified figure. The governor will be delighted, the family will be delighted, everybody will be delighted and I shall be delighted myself."

Winkie and I sat there listening with suitably solemn and sympathetic countenances.

It was at that dinner I introduced you to Marguérite. Elinor had persuaded you to take the house in Wilton Place. Caryll Dunbar was then in favour. He was bear-leading some Maharajah or other and was considered a good deal of a dog. He was a society *marcheur* of the doubtful origin type with something cosmopolitan in his make-up, the sort of man who knew everybody but didn't know them for long at a time. He ended in jail but he was all right then, and he was useful to Elinor because it suited him to be seen about with her and to ask her to meet people. She was smarter than ever and everybody knew she was old Kurt's daughter-in-law. Dunbar talked familiarly about William and Frederick Kurt, said he did his business with them and so on. I knew all about him from Dinny's sister who'd been his mistress off and on so that when you told me what a charming fellow he was and how

nice it was for Elinor to have such a delightful man to pilot her about, I'd got him placed.

The queer thing was, though, that I never could tell you what I knew because you either took my tips as an insult to Elinor or you promptly thought I was lying. You never seemed to discover that I lied when there was a point in lying, not when there wasn't. Elinor made you believe whatever she liked and as she always thought every man who paid her attention for reasons of his own was madly in love with her and as everyone who was in love with her was an eagle until he chucked her, it wasn't much use my trying to post you.

Marguérite was sitting at the next table to us at Romano's and was looking very much her best. You always had a weakness for French women. She'd got her old man with her, I knew him, his name was Hart. He was one of those chaps who go racing and know all the jockeys and book-makers and a good many owners but never seem to bet. He was what they call "as cute as they make 'em." He didn't pay any attention to you making eyes at Marguérite nor to her responses. Of course, you thought he didn't notice and you were fearfully and awfully charmed and fascinated by the audacious, surreptitious flashes from under her carbonated eyelashes. Not that Marguérite was over made up. She had a good skin, very agreeable grey eyes and hair that wasn't the worse

for being touched up with peroxide ; the usual French type, in fact, and just your mark. When they got up and went out, I knew you were fluttering and I gave Dinny the tip. She caught her in the lady's cloak-room and fixed it. That was the beginning of your long affair with Marguérite but I did not tell you then that Hart met me at Sandown the following Saturday and asked me whether you were well-off as he wouldn't like Marguérite to be out in the cold as she was used to a good deal of comfort.

The Marguérite *collage* wasn't a bad thing for you on the whole. You could have slipped her any time, if you'd wanted to, although you started all wrong as you always did. You never were satisfied to take what the Gods offered without trying to get something more with it than was intended. In the case of Marguérite I knew all about it because Dinnie was interested and kept herself informed. It must have been a month after that evening at Romano's that Marguérite told her you hadn't become her lover though you'd been seeing her nearly every day and her old man had chucked her on your account.

Characteristically, you'd dried up to me. You didn't mention her name till long afterwards but I knew from what Dinnie told me you wouldn't have anything to do with her till she was what you called "in love" with you. To me that's unspeakable foolishness. It's bad enough when

a woman gets hold of one but to go out and look for trouble as you did is simply pulling the devil's tail. I knew the explanation well enough. You're romantic. You married too young to have the usual boy and girl love affairs ; you got nothing of that sort out of Elinor and you hankered after them. So you tried to make a romance out of whatever came along and you made yourself believe that women are like characters in Victorian novels. Even that wouldn't have mattered if you had let yourself go and had a good time like I did with Dinnie and my other little pals, after you were over the romantic part and had got down to something real and solid. But not a bit of it. Instead of taking Marguérite out and enjoying yourself, you were haunted by a sense of guilt and you went sneaking about, turning your romance into a hangdog, hole-in-the-corner intrigue of the rottenest kind. And all because you hadn't the spunk to out with it on account of a woman you cared about as little as she cared for you. And, what's more, you were much more likely to be given away to Elinor, going about in the way you did, than if you'd been open as I was. The people you see when you're about town are generally in the same boat as you are, so they keep their mouths shut. But any blighter can catch sight of you spooking into sixty-nine umpteen Street and drop a hint about it to someone he wants to do

you in the eye with. Wives are always the last people to hear and when they do, you lie ; you lie till you're blue in the face. Nancy went on believing me for years, in fact, until I stopped lying because it bored me too much.

You didn't know how sick you used to make me in those days. I knew that you were longing for freedom and there you were hanging on to Elinor, holding her skirts up out of the mud.

I don't know when exactly you went off to the Black Forest to fish. How anyone ever can go fishing beats me, the very sound of the word gives me a pain. Anyhow it was either the next spring or the spring after. I couldn't imagine what Elinor would do, stuck in a forest, but I heard afterwards that she'd worked the whole scheme with that chap Chillingley and that he'd got an interest in Schwarzenheim's racing stud.

You went as potty on the fishing as you did over the horse-coping. You made me come down and watch you cast at Hendon where the tackle-makers kept a bright youth to teach customers and stick them with the most expensive outfit. You made me start casting too, but when it came to that fiddling fidgeting business of tying nasty little flies on to bits of gut, I saw it was no good to me. Well, off you went and a week or so afterwards I got a letter from you telling me you'd caught I don't know how many trout weighing I don't know how many tons or stones, and you

sent me a photo of yourself on a postcard, got up like the diver who used to go down at the end of the pier at Brighton if you gave him half a dollar, with a rod in your hand, a lot of flies round your hat and a basket of trout at your feet like an old Breton fishwife.

Dinnie and I had Marguérite to dinner a night or two later and I showed her the photograph.

She threw up her hands, "*Comment! il me quitte pour aller manger des huitres.*"

"*Pas huitres, bécasse, truites.*"

"*Truites, huitres, qu'est ce que tu veux que ça me fâche. J'y vais—moi—J'y vais. Donnes-moi l'adresse, veux-tu.*"

A week later I got your letter telling me how you were standing on the bridge watching the water rippling by in the moonlight and you felt something behind you and there was Marguérite—in a valley in the depths of the Black Forest with no other hotel than the little one you were at and nine miles from the nearest station. There you were, both standing in the moonlight on the bridge as though you were on a stage with the limelight pouring on you, and Elinor supposedly strolling with Chillingley somewhere in the darkness beyond. Your description of the scene was vivid. And the record part of it was that you enjoyed it and when she told you she'd kept her carriage on the road above and was going to drive back again that night, you were quite

unhappy. But what you couldn't understand was how she found you. Now you know.

When she came back, she told me she had to get out of the carriage and scramble down a path behind the hotel from which she could look into the rooms. She hadn't a notion how she was going to get hold of you and she was wondering if, by chance, she'd see you through the windows. She didn't, but she saw Elinor and she saw Chillingley and they seemed to be enjoying themselves very much, in a way that people don't generally enjoy themselves in public. That might have been true or not. She swore it was and when I said "Why don't you tell him?" she answered "He wouldn't believe it and he'd hate me."

Quite so. For the same reason I didn't tell you what I knew. You're a man who has to find things out for himself.

VIII

THE boy was getting big and strong and Edie was nearly two, I think, when the governor invited us all to the villa to spend a few weeks of the winter. I was doing pretty well on the Stock Exchange but of course I was spending twice as much as I made and I meant to sit up and be good while I was there so as to get the old man to square me up.

One of the first evenings after we got there the governor started talking about you. He wanted me to explain how you could go on standing the sort of life you were living with Elinor and asked me if I could suggest any way of making you see what a b. f. you were. I told him I knew none and then he returned to the charge and said something like this. "I know Richard is getting into debt. I'm not going to tell you how I know it. But I think that the best thing I can do is to refuse to pay. When the shoe pinches and he has to sell up, perhaps she'll throw him overboard."

Now, you can imagine what was going on in my mind. I owed a lot myself which I had every intention of getting out of him and here he was

treating me like the staid, respectable business-like brother whose advice he was asking about the prodigal.

I tried to gain time to think the position over, shook my head and said "I don't know." I was wondering whether, on the one hand, if he made up his mind to let you buzz he wouldn't treat me the same, or whether, on the other, I could make sure enough of him to say: "Well, look here. I think you're right. I don't like it and what's more I owe a good deal myself. But my wife isn't Elinor. She's a highly respectable or something of that sort woman (the Lord knows she was that) and I've got two children. If you'll pay up for me, I'll cut down my expenditure. I make a good deal of money in my present firm and if you and Uncle Fred will put me into your business, I'll soon make back anything you find now." I was thinking that once I got in there, not only should I be all right myself but I could keep you going and if once Elinor chucked you, the governor would do the right thing. But then I had you to deal with, how the devil was I to explain it to you? With your hide-bound, high-falutin ideas, you'd simply blaze away at me and tell me I was a crook and if the governor let you go smash, you'd probably say that the whole thing was a put-up job to get Elinor into the cart, and you'd stick to her all the tighter.

Just as I was revolving this complicated problem in my mind that butler, whose name was Arrow and called himself Harrow or whose name was Harrow and called himself Arrow, came into the room saying "There's a lady outside enquiring for Mr. Richard."

The governor looked at me enquiringly. "Go and see who it is," he said. I went to the front door and there, if you please, sitting in one of those little Monte Carlo victorias with two ponies, as bold as brass, sat Dinnie. I jumped in beside her and told the man to drive out of the grounds.

"What the devil's the meaning of this?"

"Nix. Just wanted a change, Tony. What's the harm, I said I'd come to see Richard, as you told me."

She dimpled her face up and grinned with her saucy little nose in the air; she'd evidently been doing herself well at dinner.

"Next?" I asked.

"Oh! any old thing. Aren't you coming in to Monte with me?"

I shook my head. "Nothing doing," I said.

"Well, give us some dibs, Tony darling."

You know the governor's curiosity. All this took time and just as I was handing her over the contents of my pocket-book, he came round the corner of the shrubbery with his black soft hat pulled over his eyes and a cigar glowing above

his white beard. He came right up to the carriage and bowed.

“ You’re a friend of Richard’s I believe. He’s not staying here, he’s in England. Is there anything I can do for you ? ”

Dinnie put on her best manicure accent, “ Neyu, thank yew. I just came to call. The major asked me to look in as I came by.”

“ Oh, the major ! ” the governor repeated, lifted his hat and went back to the house.

When I got in, the old man had sat down at his table and was writing a letter. Meanwhile his carriage had come to take him into Monte Carlo.

He looked up with his pen in his fingers, “ I’m not such a fool as to believe that woman’s the major’s wife. Besides, I’ve seen a photograph of Mrs. O’Grady, a quiet-looking harmless lady. That was a demi-mondaine. What she came here for I can’t think. But of course Elinor knows Richard’s as bad as she is. There’s nothing to be done except pay—as usual.”

As a matter of fact I believe Uncle Fred paid for you but the governor put me straight ; he never twigged anything and no harm was done. I expect it was just as well things happened as they did. After all, Dinnie might just as well have been your mistress as Marguérite and it was rather a score off you for being so blooming circumspect. But I never told that little devil

to give your name at the villa, only when she rang me up on the telephone at home, in case Nancy answered it. That was a regular tart's trick.

IX

THE next thing that happened, as far as I can remember, was the Boer war. Another change came over you. You began making yourself unpleasant to everybody by sympathising with the Boers, going on just as you did at the time of the Wilde case. I never can see the point of going openly against the crowd; one can think what one likes but one doesn't have to advertise it. You're just the opposite, you've got a mania for opposition and it always does you in. And as though you were set on being contrary, you joined the yeomanry and said you'd go out. It didn't make matters better for you that you couldn't go because you were broke. No one except Cyril Fanshawe and old Billy Vaughan knew how keen you were to go until you realised that, if you got potted, Elinor would have the bag to hold.

We had it all out one night at my house in Northumberland Place. You dined with us and it began by our talking about the boy. You'd been teaching him to ride and you'd got fond of him. You were on my weak spot there but I didn't know how much he was to me till long after

that. You had absolutely made up your mind to go out then. You said you hoped you wouldn't come back and you wanted Cyril to have anything of yours he liked. Then you began that slop about Elinor. You were going to see Brinton the next day about your debts and he was to see the governor after you'd gone. Your life was insured in her favour and you were sure they would do the right thing. I don't suppose you knew that when it came down to your actually going, I got wind up and was going to prevent it if I could. So I told you straight that "I happened to know" (Uncle Fred's patent phrase) the governor wouldn't pay and that if anything did happen to you, Elinor would get next door to nothing from them. You didn't speak for a moment; you looked at me as though you wanted to throttle me and then you suddenly calmed down and asked me if I minded telling you what I knew. Then I lied, lied my very best, looking you straight in the eye.

"Leslie told me. You know how he sucks up to the old man. Someone he knows in Leicestershire told him you'd been writted for your corn bill and he passed it on, you bet. You know Elinor's dressmaker's bills are the talk of the family. The governor swore he'd let you be sold up this time."

When I lied I always believed in detail; it's more convincing. But you must lie strategic-

ally. One must be ready for the other chap's questions and your first one was: "What had Leslie to gain by injuring me with the governor?"

"He doesn't specially want to injure you," I said, "he'd say deprecatingly, 'I'm afraid Dick's in a mess again, awful pity,' or something of that sort. He'd want to show by contrast what a steady chap he is, no debts, careful, economical. He's got his eye on the business, you know that."

Another thing is that a lie—to be convincing—must have truth in it. It happened that Leslie and I had been having some talks about the possibility of our joining forces in an attempt to get taken into Kurt and Co., and I had told him what the governor had said in the South about not paying your debts to bring pressure upon Elinor. Leslie always was going sneaking about in the family, anyhow, and I knew the bastard was too big a fool to get clear if you tackled him; he wouldn't be able to explain what he'd said and what I'd said. The great thing when you get out on someone is to get out on an ass and to tie him up well. But you sat there with your eyes glued on me. Your next words were something like: "And he told you all that and you listened without saying a word?"

I changed my stroke. "Don't you see, Dick, I wanted to get it all out of him. If I'm to do

anything to help you, I must know how the land lies."

"So what it amounts to is that if I go to South Africa they'll let me be made a bankrupt in my absence and if I'm killed, Elinor will be left in the gutter. Is that it?"

I said yes, that was about it, but I didn't much like that dotting of i's and crossing t's, so I tried another change.

"I can't understand what you want to go for, anyhow. Everybody knows you're against the war. The fellows at the club are so sick about the way you jaw that they talk of sending you a round robin requesting you to resign."

"And you stand in with them?"

That gave me exactly the chance I wanted. "Of course, if you're going to take it like that," I said.

Then you got on your ear and jawed. "Can't you understand, Tony, that going out gives me the right to say what I think? I don't care, anyhow, because I'm sick of everything."

Then you began the whole history of the war over again; you had it all pat. I don't remember what you said, and I don't want to. I asked you what the devil you were going to do about it and what bally difference it made to you whether one set of scoundrels or another ran a country? Why couldn't you do like other people and enjoy life instead of worrying yourself about what

can't be helped? I said Elinor was quite right to call you a "world reformer."

You sat there saying nothing and, after a time, you went away, looking as if your last day had come.

The next day you went to see Brinton and I trotted off to Elinor to let her know what was up, but binding her over to secrecy. I meant to do all I knew to prevent your going to South Africa. Up to then I had always managed to keep on very good terms with Elinor, in spite of my knowing all about her little games. Of course, when she told Alfredo that she'd found out from me that he'd been having an affair with Lady Betty Verrall the whole time her husband was military attaché in Rome, the dirty dog gave me away to her. All I'd done was to tell him to keep his eye on Caryll Dunbar. I didn't like the idea of a chap with his reputation taking my sweet little unsuspecting sister-in-law to places like private rooms, people might talk about it. That's what came of trying to do a Dago a turn and it took me a long time to get her round.

As always, whenever I took a lot of trouble for you, you never told me what passed between you and Elinor afterwards, but I knew the line she must have taken. One more of your obsessions was that you had ruined her life, that you'd robbed her of the chance of marrying a better man and that whatever went wrong was always your

fault. Of course she rubbed that mixture well in whenever she got a chance and you gave her plenty of chances. All I know is you dropped going to Africa and, thank God, you stopped reforming the world for a bit.

X

I'D heard nothing of or from you for months when one morning just as I was leaving for the City, old Uncle Theo rang me up on the telephone and told me you were down with typhoid at Alfredo's place in Italy and he intended going out there to see you that very day. He said that Aunt Kate had had a letter from Elinor and that if it was as serious as she said, it was doubtful if you'd be alive when he got there. I asked him what the governor was going to do. The governor, he said, didn't take it so seriously, he believed Elinor was putting it on to make a sensation and he was going to await his, Uncle Theo's telegram after he got out there before going himself.

I didn't know what to think, the whole thing was utterly unexpected and I was rather bowled over. But I decided then and there to go with Theo and told him I'd meet him at Charing Cross for the night boat. Meanwhile off I put to the City and went straight to W. K. & Co.'s office where Uncle Fred was in no end of a state about you. He told me he had decided that if the governor didn't go with Theo, he should himself.

This touched the old man up and he changed his mind and that night the three of us went off together to Coneglio.

We arrived at about seven in the morning in the pouring rain and I must say that the first sight of you lying in that enormous dark, carved-wood bed with a damned huge canopy arrangement of red silk over it and a nun in a blue hood standing by your head, was enough to give anyone the hump. You'd got a beard nearly two inches long and your face had shrunk so that your head was only a skull. Your hands and arms were those of a skeleton, and you were stone deaf; the only part of you that seemed to be alive were your eyes which looked like black electric lights. After the governor had tried, I put my mouth against your ear and shouted something but you didn't understand. I gave it up and Uncle Theo took his turn. He said something like "You're going to get well now." After he'd repeated it about ten times you tried to mutter something but your tongue and lips wouldn't work, and out of each of your eyes a tear slowly trickled down your face. That was enough for me; I was certain you were a goner and I made for my room and my travelling bag and had a good drink of that old brandy from the Café Anglais I'd filled my flask with.

The dining-room was as big as the whole ground floor and as high as the whole house at

Brook Street. The walls of all the rooms, including the one you were in, were painted by some old Italian artist called Paolo something or other. As I looked round I wondered how it struck you lying there with the firelight playing about over the naked lady sitting on a bull on your ceiling upstairs. There you had to lie, poor devil, like a bit of rotten firewood staring at her great fat thighs, and wishing to God, I should imagine, that the blasted bull would get on with the job, whatever it was, instead of prancing about with her on his back all day and all night.

The Contessa had prepared a sumptuous breakfast and she, her daughter Zoë, Alfredo and Elinor were waiting for us. I'd never seen Elinor look so absolutely lovely, her face was very pale and she was very dark under the eyes. She'd got on a transparent lacy *peignoir* arrangement. All the properties were there for a rare scene on the stage—the party sitting round the black table with one of those Italian table-cloths on it that have lace let in, an enormous silver dish full of white grapes in the middle, two high silver candelabra full of lighted candles at either side, and the grey daylight scarcely able to get into the room because of the heavy curtains.

The Contessa was very handsome ; she had a mass of snow-white hair and the kind of sallow skin that looks like yellow ivory. The governor, who, like me, can throw things off, sat on one side

of her making himself agreeable and talking about friends they had in common at Trieste where she came from ; his reddy grey beard showed up against her black velvet dress and he looked as spick-and-span as though he'd just dressed, although we'd had to sit up in the train for two nights. Uncle Theo sat on the other side of her, looking tousled and tired, the top of his bald head, which he was leaning upon his hand, caught the shine of the candle-light. He didn't say a word but went on eating grapes, spitting out the skins in a manner that, I could see, disgusted Elinor. Zoë was very dark, her hair was done in a great plaited coil round her head. I caught her looking at me under her heavy eye-lids and said to myself, that seems all right, when suddenly you, poor wretched devil, came into my head, lying there in that glorified hearse, staring at the naked fairy on the bull.

I looked at Elinor, asking myself what she was thinking of it all. I wasn't down on her for not coming upstairs with us, I could understand her thinking it was quite enough for you to have three of us staring at you, which was all she could do. I looked at Alfredo, at Zoë, at the mother ; there was a family ready-made for her. Whether the women would have welcomed her into it I don't know but she wouldn't have worried about that ; she'd got Alfredo where she wanted him. If things went the way I expected them to go,

it was a bit of all right for her. I knew you wouldn't care; on the contrary, I was pretty sure you'd have been very much relieved if you had known that if you went west, she'd get home on Alfredo. I should have in your place. But there was something a bit uncanny about it all.

When the cigarettes were handed round, Uncle Theo made a sign to me and took me to the other end of the room. "I am going to see the nurse," he said. "You stop here—I don't want them to notice."

I sat down by Zoë again and she began talking, she supposed you and I were awfully fond of each other, we were very much alike. Did I like sport, she was mad about hunting. Did I know her brother was one of the best riders in Italy? How lovely my sister-in-law was, didn't I adore her, they all did. She went on nineteen to the dozen in perfect English with a charming Italian accent while Alfredo and Elinor talked in low tones on the other side of the table.

Uncle Theo hadn't come back when the doctor was announced, a red-faced, bluff chap who, anyone could see, was a damned good sort. The Contessa introduced him but he went upstairs without saying anything to anybody. There was nothing to do but wait until he came down and told us what to expect. I'd made up my mind you were done for anyhow but at a time like that one doesn't think at all. We all went on talking.

Zoë told me your illness had stopped your all going to Rome together for the hunting season, that Alfredo had bought two hunters at your Leicester sale, had sent his stud there and had to bring them back again. I could see she was annoyed with you for upsetting the whole apple-cart, and she talked loud enough for Elinor and Alfredo to hear ; I saw them look at each other, and I hadn't much doubt but that they were as sick with you as she was. It's only natural to go a bit further and say that they were all wishing to God you'd either kick or get well as quickly as possible, for which, in a way, I didn't blame them.

At last the vet came down followed by Uncle Theo ; both were grinning all over their faces. You were over the crisis, he said, and if nothing unforeseen happened, you'd pull through. The governor went up to him and they jabbered in Italian while the Contessa, who looked delighted, came over to me and gave me an unexpected and smacking kiss on the cheek. As that was evidently the thing to do, I did the same to her and also to Zoë. Then I kissed Elinor, Elinor kissed the Contessa, Zoë and Alfredo shook hands with the governor, Uncle Theo immediately wrote out a telegram for Uncle Fred, and we all went to our rooms to dress.

In the afternoon, Alfredo had out a brake and four horses and took us all out for a drive. It

was a beautiful afternoon with a light frost in the air. We all felt we had a right to feel easy in our minds and we were quite a gay party inside the brake; the governor was in his best form, cracking jokes, and Uncle Theo told some of his American railway stories which we bore patiently.

I was too much occupied with Zoë during the drive to think about Elinor who sat on the box-seat but after we got home and had tea, Uncle Theo having meanwhile told us that the nurse's report was satisfactory, I took her aside. The whole ground floor was a series of saloons communicating by carved folding doors with mirrors in them and we wandered into the farthest away and sat down together on a big settee covered with red damask. That was all right enough so far, but I hadn't the slightest idea what I was going to say. I'd brought her there to have a talk but how was I going to begin? You know Elinor wasn't the sort to give you a lead or make it easier. I began by putting my arm round her waist and was going to give her a warm brotherly kiss on the mouth but she moved her head sharply, pulled herself away and sat up straight.

"Drop that, Anthony," she said. "You slobber over me one minute and give me away the next. I know you."

This wasn't a good beginning but I put a lot of blandness into my voice and taking her hand, holding it between both mine, asked her why she

said such a nasty thing as that to me, no one had ever been a better friend to anyone than I'd always been to her. I seem to have said that to nearly everybody at different times. Of course they don't always believe it but something sticks if you say it in the right tone and put the right expression into your face.

"I don't know how you dare look me in the face and say such a thing. I think you're the biggest liar I ever knew in my life."

It's something to be a good liar in a world where there's so much competition. I knew what she was thinking about so I opened about it at once. "I know you're down on me about that blackguard Dunbar."

She tried to interrupt me but I went on "I was acting for the best. I may have been wrong but I knew Alfredo would hear about him sooner or later and——"

She took her hand away. "Hear what? What are you insinuating?"

"Steady, Nell. Do keep calm. Hear that he was a swindler and a blackmailer." I looked at her out of the corner of my eyes as I said that and hers dropped, I'd touched the sore spot. "And I knew the swine was trading on your innocence. I also knew how devoted Alfredo was to you and I never supposed he would misunderstand my intention and make out I'd said——"

“ He didn’t make out anything. You told him Major Dunbar took me to private rooms.”

I looked at her in blank amazement. “ He told you I said that ! ” I put horror into my tone. “ D’you mean to say—— ? No this is past a joke. Look here, we must have this thing out.” I jumped up. “ I’m going to fetch Alfredo now and face him with it.” I made as if I was after him that second.

Elinor put her hand on my arm. “ Sit down at once, Tony. Do you think I want a scandal at such a time as this with poor Richard—Oh, I have nothing but worry ” and she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

That was all right. I resumed my affectionate demeanour and caressed her hand again. “ Don’t be upset, Nell dear. It was only that I couldn’t stand your thinking me such a beast. You see, now, that Alfredo was just trying it on as jealous men always do. Of course he’s madly in love with you. By the way, I’ve never seen even you look so beautiful. You look like a lovely old picture—and you must have been having an awful time, poor little girl.”

Elinor came round. “ Awful isn’t the name for it. For days we haven’t dared breathe, he might have died at any moment. It all came so suddenly, we just had time to get the nurses. I can’t tell you how good the Contessa’s been—they’ve all been angels. And it’s upset all their

plans. They had their rooms engaged at the Grand Hotel. Fredo had sent the horses on—all sorts of complicated arrangements with Richard——”

“ That’ll be all right now he’s getting better.”

“ All right ? Why, at best it will be weeks and weeks before he can be moved. And he may have a relapse. Oh ! it’s awful, simply awful ” and out came the handkerchief again.

I thought a moment. Now when I’m with someone I have a friendly feeling towards, I can’t help seeing things from their point of view, for the time being I’m on their side quite genuinely. And if there’s something to be done for them that I can do—a bit of finessing—I’m for it. Besides I like people to have a good time and do what they want to do just as I like to do what I want myself. I simply don’t believe in mortifying the flesh and making sacrifices. Deliberately to keep something nasty in your mouth and go on chewing it because it’s supposed to be wicked to spit it out, seems to me idiotic. If all went well, there you’d be, in that beastly hearse, for weeks to come. You’d have to go on staring at that horrible painted ceiling and being fed on pap and washed, and everything else that’s disgusting, by those two medieval Irish virgins. You’d got a good doctor and everything else that was necessary. Why was a beautiful young woman you hadn’t really any use for and who didn’t pretend

to have any use for you to be stuck in a place like the British Museum, only in the depths of an unknown country, miles away from civilisation, just because she happened to be your wife, when her friends were ready to take her to one of the nicest places in Europe, and to give her the time of her life ?

“ Look here,” I said, “ we shall be here for three days. If old Richard goes on all right during that time, he’ll be out of the wood. As soon as we’ve gone, you jolly well pack up and go to Rome. I know Richard would want you to and so do you. And who else’s business is it ? ”

Elinor didn’t get much chance of answering because Zoë came into the room. She’d been looking for us everywhere. Zoë had a jolly way of laughing while she spoke and showing all her teeth like a playful puppy. She had been up to Dick’s room with Uncle Theo, there was no doubt about his being better. At the beginning, when he had a high fever but before he’d got to the worst stage, she used to go up and look round what she called the *baldechino* of the bed, to see how he was getting on without his seeing her, and once, for some reason, her appearance had enraged him and he had thrown a medicine bottle at her head. The poor devil couldn’t do that now but when she went up with Uncle Theo, he had muttered something and Sister Agatha

had understood. He didn't want Zoë to come and look at him. I knew why. She was a girl and a man doesn't like a girl to see him when he's got enough consciousness of his condition to know he's a repulsive sight; he resents his helplessness being taken advantage of. Zoë had no idea of that and thought it was an excellent joke.

"What did I tell you, Nell? He's going to get well and you'll all be able to go to Rome in another week."

Zoë jumped up in the air. "Rome, Rome. How lovely! How divine! No. You think so, Signor Antonio, how splendid." She embraced Elinor and danced round the room.

During the next three days you kept on improving. The last time I went up to see you, I noticed, though you couldn't do more than mumble some sounds, that you could move your lips a little more and by the last afternoon before we left, when I shouted very slowly in your ear you seemed to understand. The nurse never left you a minute but I told her I wanted to try and tell you something private. As soon as she went out I put my mouth close to your ear and shouted each word separately, "Do you mind Elinor going to Rome?" You went on staring at me but I didn't know if you understood, so I tried again. Then you closed your eyes and opened them, but you didn't try to speak. I shouted a

third time and I could see you were trying to answer, I put my ear close to your mouth and heard what I'm sure was "Orri" (all right). Then I called the nurse in and went downstairs.

The three days had passed quite pleasantly. The frosty weather continued and we went for drives every afternoon. It seems that Italians are more sensible than we are and never live in their country places in the winter, and except for one family we were taken to call on, the descendants of some old Doge who lived in a corner of another museum larger and even more mausoleum-like than Coneglio, we saw no one outside the family, unless I count the Curé who came in every evening after dinner. Once there was an attempt at music and the Contessa and Zoë played the piano and sang. But it was a pretty deadly entertainment and after the first night, the old people played cards. We four, Elinor, Zoë, Alfredo and I, generally started the evening with a game of billiards on a very good English table, but afterwards we broke up into pairs.

Zoë and I got to be excellent pals, she was very free and easy and straightforward, not at all what I supposed Italian girls to be. The curious thing is that I didn't want to make up to her after the first; she was very attractive but that sort cramp one's style by their chaff. All she cared about was sport, and women who look upon men

just as sporting partners are no use to me. That last evening I told her about my shouting in your ear and that I knew you wanted them to go off to Rome.

She said she had discussed it with her mother but she wanted to ask Signor Kurt what he thought.

"The governor?" I said. "What's it got to do with him?"

"He's Elinor's father-in-law. She couldn't go if he didn't approve, could she?"

"Dick doesn't ask the governor's approval of what he does when he's well so why should his wife when he's ill? Was your mother intending to go herself?"

"Oh no, she wouldn't go for anything. She hardly ever leaves here."

"Well then, there you are. She'll see that Richard's all right. You do what I tell you. If he goes on well for the next few days, pack your traps and go. I'll tell Elinor that Richard said it was all right."

And so I did.

The next day we lit off for England, without anything more being said about Elinor, Zoë and Alfredo going to Rome. I left you apparently going on all right. You were still lying there staring except when you were sleeping and you didn't seem to hear or speak much better, but the doctor said you were getting on slowly and

it was arranged that there was to be a daily telegram sent to the governor.

After we'd been back about ten days, the governor dined with Nancy and me one night and after dinner he said he had something to say to me. I wondered what was up, more or less taking it for granted that there was some trouble brewing with my firm. But it was something very different. The old aunts had, of course, been informed by their brothers of your illness and the poor old things had been very perturbed. They were going to Italy for the winter anyhow but they had hastened their departure to go and see how you were getting on. They arrived at Coneglio less than a week after we left and found Elinor, Zoë and Alfredo gone. They might have been less horrified at that if, by bad luck, you hadn't had a relapse while they were there. You know all about it and that you devilish near went out. But the old ladies couldn't get over Elinor's leaving you, and the governor thoroughly agreed with them. He said that had settled her in his eyes, he'd never see her again if he could help it. He'd had a baddish turn about you, worse than I realised. He said it had been a lesson to him and he had but one prayer to make about you, that in some way or other he'd live to see your life and Elinor's separated, for ever.

He asked me what I thought about it and I said : " I quite agree with you. And just for that

reason I think her leaving him at Coneglio was the best thing she could have done. He'll know now that she doesn't care a bean for him."

"Will he?" was all the governor answered.

I suppose all I said was "Um."

XI

I KEPT up with Zoë after I got back to London. It was a new experience for me to have a friendship with a girl in which there was no humbug or pretence of any kind. It also amused me to know what Elinor was up to in Rome and what was going on generally as Zoë gave me all sorts of odd bits of news. It was through her letters that I heard that you had "got religion," your latest obsession. In all Zoë's letters she urged me to come out to Rome for a couple of weeks and the idea strongly tempted me. I had never been there and though the antiquity part of it wasn't in my line, I knew there were plenty of the sort of attractions that were. So, one fine day, I told that drunken blackguard Ruggles to pack my things and take the tickets and within forty-eight hours I was ringing the bell outside the garden gate of the convent in the Via degli Frati in Florence.

It was easy to drop in on you on the road to Rome ; I wanted to see you anyhow and giving this out officially as the purpose of my trip, not only afforded me a natural excuse for Nancy, but also a creditable reason in the eyes of the governor

who was so much edified by my fraternal zeal that he gave me fifty towards my expenses. When one comes to think of it, the governor was very easy really, one could always play upon one or the other of his weaknesses or fads or prejudices. Uncle Fred was always a harder nut, especially when he got wise and I tried him a bit too high at the last.

On this occasion, if I'd carried a conscience about with me, it would have been light. I had no game on at all though I dare say I had hopes of something worth while turning up.

A fat sunburnt nun came to the gate and grinned all over her jolly face when I told her I was your brother. She took me into that charming little room opening into the garden at the back which they'd given you as a sitting-room. I hadn't told you I was coming and when you saw me standing in the door, you were knocked end-ways. You were still fearfully thin, your neck looked like a plucked chicken's, and you'd got a beastly little light-pointed beard like a French professor. Your manner had quite changed, you seemed to have no life in you. Your voice was so low I could hardly hear what you said and you were still very deaf. You were reading some Latin book which you were making notes about on foolscap paper and the table was covered with dictionaries. I asked you what it was all about and what you were doing it for. You said it

was something to do with the foundation of the order of the Capuchin monks and that you were doing it to help your friend José Lobkoviecz.

It took some time before you settled down to talking. I'm not easily fazed but you seemed to have become someone else and I felt almost as though I were a stranger making your acquaintance for the first time. That partly wore off when you began asking about the family, but even then you spoke as if you had ceased to have anything to do with them or anybody else I knew. It was something in your tone, a sort of sickening, weak gentleness. I sat there as if I was playing a game of questions and answers and all the time I was asking myself what I was going to do about it.

Gradually you began talking a little more freely and I spotted meaning under your words. You spoke about us all as though we belonged to a world you had nothing to do with. We were all sinful, wicked children of Mammon whom you felt awfully sorry for and forgiving to as became a Christian. You were my brother in Christ but not in any other way.

So that's his new obsession, I thought, there'll be a bit of fun to be got out of this before we've done. But I didn't give myself away. On the contrary, I took your confoundedly irritating voice, your silly far-away smile and your idiotic

gentleness, lying down. I didn't tell you that Marguérite had sent her love to you and would be glad to know when you were going to let her have her half-year's rent and I didn't inform you that the call option on Bloemfontein Estates which my firm bought for you had resulted in a five points profit and that I was jolly well going to have a beano at your expense in Rome ; such corrupt considerations were not for your saintly ear. No, I listened with respectful and sympathetic attention to all you had to say about your new-found peace and the lofty serenity of your existence. You had never known what happiness was before, you couldn't tell me how different everything seemed now. Everything was clear to you, your road lay open, you would never turn back again. You told me how beautiful it was to rise in the early morning, and to go to Matins in the little chapel and hear the sweet voices of the nuns raised in praise of the Most High. Had He not saved your life that you might give it to Him ? You didn't want me to think you were preaching, who were you to judge others ? No man had been worse than you, you cared for nobody and nothing but your own selfish self-indulgence, your own callous lusts and pleasures. You didn't expect me to feel as you did, how could I ? I hadn't had " the providential revelation and illumination " (those were the words) of a long and dangerous illness. I hadn't had the

privilege, the inestimable privilege of experiencing the divine mercy. I sat there wondering how I could listen to such appalling drivel.

I sat there till it was your lunch time and the same genial-looking nun came in with a tray and began removing your Latin books and dictionaries and laying the cloth. I waited while she brought in another tray from which she unloaded a beautiful roast chicken, a dish of fried potatoes, another of artichoke hearts, a large pat of delicious yellow butter and a good-sized decanter of red wine. And I didn't refuse your and her invitation to partake of them, congratulating myself and you that your latest obsession had its good side. We had a jolly lunch and I was glad to see that your heavenly visions had had a good effect on your appetite, so good in fact that I thought it wouldn't be very long before the appetite changed the visions. Glorious coffee was brought by one of the nuns who had nursed you, in fact, the one who did actually save your life as you then explained, by rushing up and giving you a draught just as you were going under. The resentment she still felt against the Contessa for insisting on her having her meals downstairs and thereby risking your life, was to me agreeably un-Christian, but I didn't observe that either of you were aware of it.

There was a slight but perceptible change in your attitude after lunch. You said you'd have

to find other quarters as you couldn't stay at the convent when you were well. You thought you'd go to Sicily which your friend Lobkoviecz had told you was the best place to spend the early spring at. But you didn't know what to do about Elinor. I said, leave her alone, she's all right at Rome. You thought a minute and then began about what it was your duty to do about her. So it was now a matter of duty. I suggested it was your duty to let her do what she liked and to do what you liked yourself and that as I was going to Rome that evening, I'd find out and let you know what she wanted. I had to tell you then about the Bloemfontein Estates, and I must say you were very decent and told me I could go halves with you on the deal. That eased things considerably and made me more inclined to be patient with your new performance which before lunch had begun getting pretty badly on my nerves.

Just as you were beginning to tell me what a clever and cultured man your friend José was, how gifted a musician and how wonderful it was of him to live for months in a monastery devoting his life to teaching the little boys in the monks' school music, there was a knock on the door and the nun showed him in. I must say he was a cheery cove with his round beaming face and his fat Austrian accent. There wasn't much saintliness about him. I'd not seen anyone exactly like

him before but I knew his sort the moment he came in and began speaking.

I'm not down on them, I always rather like them. They're generally cleverer and more sympathetic and easier to get on with than other men, especially when they're foreigners. But I could no more make a mistake about him than I could take a bottle of champagne cider for a magnum of Clicquot. He knew that I'd sized him up and didn't think the worse of him for it. You must have been surprised at the shine he took to me and at our walking off together half an hour later.

He and I spent most of the afternoon together. He took me to a most amusing little café where he introduced me to sundry artists and others, all of his own kind. He made no secret to me of having had several minor troubles such as having to leave Vienna and Paris at different times. He said Italy was the only country where one could live in peace and he intended to stay there. We talked a lot about you, he said you were *exalté* but he'd often seen people like that after they'd been ill and it wouldn't last after you got well again. He was awfully tickled when I told him that you were tremendously impressed with his godliness and good works. He said you were a darling and he hoped I wouldn't say anything that would change your good opinion of him. Of course I assured him I wouldn't but how could I

go off to Rome without giving an innocent like you the tip? It was all to the good that it cured you of your latest obsession. Before I got back to London you were in Taormina where of course Elinor joined you again when she'd got all she could out of Rome.

XII

AT times our lives ran together, at others they were so separate that we hardly knew more about each other than if we'd been strangers. Our wives had a good deal to do with that. Elinor did all she could to keep me at a distance, because she knew I knew too much and Nancy was generally uneasy if I saw too much of you because I had found you so handy to get out on that she really believed you were a sort of Old Nick. This dodge of mine cut two ways, I don't think it was a success on the whole but I must say at times it worked like a charm. I traded purely on Nancy's particular kind of straightness. I knew that when I told her I had to do this, that, or the other which involved my disappearance for hours or days, because, if I didn't, something awful might happen to you, or something of that sort, she would never tell anyone in the family anything about it. As to giving you away, as she would have supposed she was doing, to Elinor, she'd have died first. From the time that I first met her in Australia, I had always talked a lot about you and she always knew that I cared more about you than anyone in the world. I'd told her no

end of stories about you, most of them made up. The point of them generally was that you'd done some more or less dreadful or risky thing which ought to have landed you in a frightful mess, but didn't, because of some equally wonderful thing I did to save you at the last minute. Nancy had rather the cinema temperament, anyhow, in her ideas of virtue and vice and heroism, so my yarns went down. I hadn't any design when I told them but they made some of those infernally dull evenings at old Scudamore's at Watseka pass, jawing away after two or three good stiff whiskies in the verandah, in the evenings, while the stockmen were driving the walers into the yards, the old chap smoking his pipe and Nancy lying in the hammock, nursing the boy. It would have made your hair curl to hear some of those yarns.

So, whether it was to the good or not, it made it easy afterwards for me to run you into the show at short notice for any special part I wanted to put you up for. Another thing that made it easier still was Elinor's jealousy and spitefulness, but that part was really to the bad, because it was no part of my scheme to make Nancy think you would ever want to do me down and that was exactly what she did think after she knew Elinor. The result of that was to make her think I was an innocent stalking-horse for your diabolical designs, a sort of sedulous ape you made use of to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. And once she

got that into her head you were in for it and I couldn't make her see it in any other way—you know how obstinate she was. So that, in spite of myself, I found I was playing up to her idea of me and only when she fathered some particularly rank outrage on to you, I'd say, "No, Nancy. Dick isn't as bad as you think. He didn't mean it in that way. It looks like it, I know, but it's quite different really," which I knew rather confirmed her opinion than otherwise.

About the time I went to see you at Florence, I was by way of working a new partnership deal with Sammy Michaelis. Sammy was all right, he was a pal, and he knew my position. He wanted capital and was on the right side of the old man with whom I always believed he had a pull because of something he'd done for him behind the curtain. Be that as it may, he never gave him away. W. K. & Co. put up a good lump of stock in Sammy's specialities and I was made a partner. This meant a pretty decent income, even in ordinary times, and a big one when there was much doing, in addition to the allowance which I handed over to Nancy.

It was from Sammy I heard about your being at Taormina. He'd gone for a spring yachting cruise in the Mediterranean and had run over there from Palermo with Kitty Fitzgerald, Daddles and some others, a pretty thick lot. When he came back he told me Elinor was a

sort of queen there, but you were dead off ; he'd never seen anyone so changed. You were leading the simple life in a hut in the mountains, some miles beyond the town, dressed in the most beastly way, sandals and no socks ; you'd grown a beard and wore an enormous hat and went about with horrible-looking Sicilian peasants, refusing to go into the hotels and associate with decent people. What your game was he didn't know, but everybody said you were mad. Elinor told him you'd taken up with an American girl, a Miss Mackintyre, a socialist or something of that sort and Aunt Kate told Nancy that she'd heard much the same from Elinor, who had always kept up a desultory correspondence with her since the row with mother, Kate being the only member of the family with whom Elinor was then on speaking terms. At that time Aunt Kate didn't openly champion Elinor's cause but she went out of her way to see her and talk about her to the rest of the family, showing that she, at all events, didn't mean to cold-shoulder her. This may partly have been because old Theo, with his moral ideas, wanted to keep you and Elinor together and he knew everybody wanted to separate you, but I think it was more because it was Aunt Kate's speciality to be bountiful towards those for whom she could enjoy the luxury of feeling pity. She used to pity me tremendously when I came one of my periodical muckers.

I wondered at the time what Miss Mackintyre was like. Knowing your little ways, I was pretty sure she was at the bottom of your simple life stunt. Aunt Kate said she came of a very good New York family ; not exactly the kind, one would have thought, to have much sympathy with socialists.

As always happened when you had something on, you didn't tell me anything but when Uncle Theo informed me you'd left Taormina and gone off to a place I've forgotten the name of in Southern Italy, where some damned saint lived, and when Aunt Kate told Nancy Elinor had written that Miss Mackintyre had gone there too, I said to myself " This time he's got off with her." But not a bit of it. It turned out to be only one of your sickening platonic friendships. Miss Mackintyre wasn't even in the same town, she was at another one, confound her, some miles off. Of course, with your usual luck, you did yourself in by letting Uncle Theo think you were living with her. I remember a most awfully rotten letter you wrote to Uncle Fred from the place where that bally saint lived, telling him you'd determined to give up the world, the flesh and the devil and devote the rest of your days to meditation, or something of that sort. All you wanted was to be left in peace, Elinor could have all your money except a mere pittance. The result of that was he promptly cut off the allowance he'd been giv-

ing you, in addition to your settlement. The last thing he gave it to you for was to enable Elinor to cut loose and dash about Europe at their expense. You spotted old Theo as being at the bottom of it and he was, in a way, through Elinor's writing Aunt Kate that you and the Yank girl were living in sin together. You didn't take that at all in a saintly fashion. On the contrary, you wrote the old chap a stinker, telling him he was suffering from senility, which, as it was jolly near true, hurt his feelings deeply, especially when he found out he'd wronged you, a little while afterwards, and that Miss Mackintyre had chucked Plato at your head and gone off to Paris to join her mamma. I suppose you went on meditating by yourself until you came to the conclusion I came to before I left Eton, that girls have as much use for Plato as I have for ginger-beer.

While you were playing Marcus Aurelius or the early Christian martyr, I went off with Nancy and the children to the South to see the governor and make the final arrangements for my new partnership. I found the old man rather bad in health but in very good form otherwise. As he got older, he got mellow and it suited him to *encanailler* himself at Monte and leave the business to Uncle Fred who would have killed himself for him anyhow but, as it happened, was jolly glad to run it as he pleased and was making things hum.

The most useless book

Money seemed to matter less than ever ; the governor fairly lived at the tables, except in the morning, when he wrote the usual family letters and pottered about the garden. When the fits of coughing came on, he sent Mimi in to play for him and sat at the Café de Paris reading his paper and sipping his lemon squash till she came out broke or loaded with cash. Ada and Nancy hardly ever came in to Monte and made no secret of her to me ; in fact, she was taken for granted in the family and outside it. W. K., as everybody called him, was a sort of privileged character who could do what he liked.

Is it a wonder that I got to going it harder than ever myself ? What were my hundreds compared to his thousands ? Besides, as it happened, I had a run of luck that spring and I went back to London with a thousand to the good and Nancy with a pair of large pearl earrings.

The governor told me it was the best season he'd ever had and that's why he'd stayed so late, he meant to see his luck out. But I knew it had lasted over and that had not a little to do with his being so easy about forking out for your villa. He told me about that one Friday on the boat going over to Ostend where he went every week-end after he got back to London. He seemed to be rather pleased about it, chiefly, I think, because he thought your having a house on the Lake of Como would keep Elinor out of London when he

was there. How he loathed her ; her going off and leaving you when you were ill at Coneglio had been the last straw. He said that for your sake he had overlooked what, to him, was the worst offence she could have committed, her insult to my mother. "Your mother," he said, "was more to me than my life—a blow at her was a tenfold blow at me. I actually swallowed that. I tried to believe that she would repay my generosity by trying, at all events, to be something like a decent wife to your brother. But now I know. Remember this in the future, if ever your brother should feel bitter towards me, I know him better than he knows himself. He is that woman's prey, he will never escape her."

I knew later what he meant by those words, but they puzzled me then. I ought to have repeated them to you, I often thought I would, but I didn't.

Anyhow you know now.

You never wrote, as far as I can remember, but I heard at different times something of what was going on at Como. Alfredo Boncampagni came over for the horse show at Olympia and dined at Brook Street. He described the Villa Aquafonti and said it was going to be the loveliest place of its size on the lakes and that people said you were spending a fortune on it. Another time, Uncle Fred said to me : "Anthony, I shall have to put a stopper on your brother. He's going mad on

that villa and your father is much too indulgent with him. He behaves as though there was no limit to the money he can spend." This from Uncle Fred, who up till then had been by way of seeing you through your occasional financial difficulties, was an eye-opener. Then I met a chap called Rafferty, an American I'd known racing for some years. He'd heard about you from his mother, who had a place on the lake, and from what he said you were regarded as a millionaire in those parts.

It must have been the second winter after that I saw Elinor in Paris. Ada had just been married and I went over there with Olivia and Leslie to meet her on her honeymoon. One evening, at Paillard's, there was a sudden commotion of waiters and Elinor sailed in with a party and sat down majestically at a table covered with flowers, nearly opposite us. Leslie nudged me in the side ; who was the clean-shaved chap with an eye-glass and his shiny hair brushed back off his silly head ? Had I noticed his pearl cuff-links and his gold and platinum bracelets ? There were two other men with her, a bleary-faced old josser and another who looked like a white-slave trafficker but who, Gaumont said, was equerry to an Italian royalty. The by-play on both sides was rather a joke, the girl's air of indifference marking their interest and curiosity all the more, while Elinor, beyond a forced smile of recognition, studiously avoided

noticing us. Plainly, she wanted to show what devoted and distinguished admirers she'd got. We were going to the theatre and, as we passed Elinor's table on our way out, she held out her hand to Ada, while Gaumont spoke to the equerry. This brought us all to a standstill and she introduced the clean-shaved chap as Prince Fritz von Hohenthal and the old boozier as Count Baltazzo. I caught Elinor's eye and gave her a wink as we passed on and while I was putting on my cloak, a page told me Madame Kurt wanted to speak to me. So, back I went and, as I got near her table, she beamed at me with the graciousness of a condescending duchess. "Could I spare her a moment to-morrow, she wanted to ask me something. She was staying at the Ritz, perhaps I'd lunch with her." I accepted in the tone of an ineffably aristocratic Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs but that didn't seem to impress the prince, who never glanced in my direction and looked as though nothing but a sense of his own overwhelming importance kept him on this weary planet at all.

When I got to the Ritz the next day at about one, I found Elinor in the small *salon* of a suite, clad in one of her seductive *négligées*, with old bleary-face in attendance. She told him to go down and order lunch and immediately started complaining about your exposing her to the criticism of the family by leaving her alone in

Paris. "Richard refuses to move. Fortunately I've got Ugo to chaperone me. What is a woman to do if her husband throws her at anybody's head who comes along?"

"Damn well amuse herself," I said. "I should say that's just what they want their husbands to do."

"I know that's what you all think in the family," she sighed.

I assured her I never thought the same as the family about anything but I didn't see what she had to complain of. "You seem to have everything you want," I said, getting up and looking round the apartment, one of those jolly little self-contained suites with a bath and maid's room.

"That's all you seem to think of, Tony. Can't you understand that a woman gets tired of living alone?"

"Alone! why you seem to me anything but that, and if you are, you needn't be."

"You're trying to misunderstand. Do you think I don't know what they're after?"

"Well, let 'em have it—at a price."

"You're utterly amoral, Tony."

"I am, and so's everyone who's sensible. That's the trouble with Richard. He isn't and he never will be. He's got a conscience. What's he up to now?"

All she knew was that you had Cyril Fanshawe

staying with you and that you were doing a lot of reading. There were some people called Peraldi on the Lake she thought you saw a good deal of. I asked her if they were girls and when she told me there were two or three of them, I twigged. Of course you were at your old game of seeking the ideal. That put Marguérite into my head. It happened that I saw her just before I came to Paris, and she told me she was thinking of going there to live. She wanted the boy to be French, she said she could keep him there on the allowance you gave her for him. What a mug you were to land yourself with him, he's no more yours than he's mine or anyone else's. It was like you again to insist on believing a woman of that kind adored you so much she wanted to have a child by you, a dear little Richard to love and cherish now that you were no longer hers. As if a French tart deals in that sort of slop ; you're as sentimental about them as a second-rate French novelist.

I suppose it was through all that running in my head that I said something like : " If you and Dick both knew each other properly you'd neither of you have a conscience and you'd be a lot happier." What did I mean by knowing each other. I told her if you knew that she had lovers, you wouldn't think you were committing a crime by having mistresses, half your life was spent making yourself miserable about what you did

during the other half. It was time you both dropped all that rot. Why shouldn't she have lovers if she wanted to and why shouldn't you have mistresses? That couldn't possibly hurt her, could it? For once she didn't humbug. No, it couldn't hurt her.

"Exactly," I said, "well now, here's a case in point. Dick had an affair with a French tart, quite a decent sort, he hasn't had anything to do with her for years but she happened to have a child which he thinks is his. I don't but, of course the woman says so, and he keeps it. That's the sort of thing you ought to know and now I've told you." I looked her straight in the face as I spoke.

She jumped up, her eyes blazing. "Oh, indeed, and when was that charming intrigue going on?"

For a moment I got wind up. I thought I'd made a *gaffe* and there was going to be trouble. But I knew she didn't care really and that what she felt was partly a sort of rage that you should be keeping another woman's child and partly resentment at the proof of your unfaithfulness which she had known all along vaguely, but preferred to blind herself to, out of a sort of fatuous vanity. At the same time, she was thinking that now she'd got something up against you she could make some use of, so I determined to be a bit brutal and hit her quick before she could work

her case up. "While your and Caryll's little romance was in full swing."

I spoke sweetly and in quite a matter-of-course tone. Her eyes flashed and the sparks were just going to fly but she changed her mind and her expression. All Elinor's expressions were catalogued on the best stage principles; I knew that one meant supreme indifference to my vile insinuations. Her tone became unconcerned; she was hardly interested enough to ask how old the child was and how and when you had known the woman. I made her swear that she wouldn't let on to you that she knew. I had to do that to protect myself because I knew that, instead of being grateful to me as you ought, you'd never have forgiven me, or at least have thought you wouldn't and have made an awful scene.

There's the whole thing in a nutshell. You make a drama out of nothing and cast yourself for the victim's part with a guilty secret and all the rest of it. You're in a fearful stew about your wife whom you don't care a damn about knowing something that she doesn't care a damn about, so that you can go on living a life with her that you don't care a damn about. And why? Because you haven't the courage to admit to yourself that the whole thing is a sham.

The joke of it is that we had quite a cheery lunch. Baltazzo had evidently been putting in the interval by consuming cocktails and when the

prince turned up afterwards to take Elinor somewhere in his big Mercédès, he consoled himself with old brandies. The old boozier drove me to the Palais de Glace where the presence of Cléo de Merode and other pretty ladies failed to keep him awake. While we skated, he slept, waking up in time to come on to Ciro's and have a few more cocktails before he took Elinor and some new friends of hers to dinner at the Tour d'Argent.

XIII

I WAS completely flabbergasted when, as I went along the train at Charing Cross to find the governor's carriage, I caught sight of you standing on the platform. Uncle Fred was too anxious about the old man to think about anyone else, but Leslie, jostling along with me through the crowd, kept on asking me breathlessly what you'd come for, as though I knew any more than he did.

It was plain to see that the old man was done for, he had to be almost lifted out and if the car hadn't happened to get close up, I don't know how we should have got him into it. On the way to Brook Street you told me you'd come on with him because you thought he might die on the road. That would have sounded all right to anyone else but it didn't convince me if only because all the baggage you had was a handbag and I knew you too well to believe you'd have left without a change of clothes. But it wasn't only that. I could see your nerves were on edge and that you didn't know what to say, in fact, you didn't know where you were. I knew something had happened but there were no twos to

put together ; I couldn't get anything out of you.

That was an awful evening at Brook Street. The governor insisted on sitting through dinner and the rest of us had to pretend to carry on as usual. Leslie came in useful, for once, talking about Ascot. It wasn't until afterwards, when we'd got the old man into the arm-chair in the library, that we were able to take a pull on ourselves with the help of the old brandy.

You didn't make much of a job fobbing off Olivia's questions about how you'd left Elinor and how long you intended staying. You said you'd wait and see how the governor went on but even she saw that you were dodging and, before they went away, Leslie followed me into a corner and began cross-questioning me in that riling way of his. What did I think had happened, etcetera ? You looked relieved when they said good night. When Uncle Fred came out of the library with you and told me to go in to the governor, I knew they'd been talking about you and that something was up.

The old man was wonderfully cheery when I went in, said it hadn't been at all a bad journey and he'd been very glad of your company. It was awful talking to him, he couldn't utter a word without coughing himself to pieces, and I must say he was tremendously plucky. He asked me how the boy was getting on at school and

said he hoped Nancy would bring Edie to see him the next day but he didn't say anything more about you and presently he asked me to help him to sit down at his writing-table. He took a sheet of paper, I knew he was going to write to the aunts and that the first words would be "Meine liebsten."

Uncle Fred and you didn't talk long. When you both came back into the library he stood with his legs apart in front of the fireplace as he always did, pulling at his cigar and looking at the ground; we none of us said a word and the governor went on writing and coughing, crumpled up over the table; a ghastly business. You nodded your head at the door and we went into that dreary hall and sat down on two of those comfortless leather chairs; we couldn't even have a drink because the tray was in the library. Then you suddenly said "I've left Elinor for good, they both know it" and dried up with a look on your face as though you'd put on the black cap and were sentencing some poor devil to be hanged.

I was more or less expecting something of that kind, I knew that something had happened to shake you up and I wasn't surprised. But neither was I convinced, it wasn't the first time you had left Elinor and said you'd never go back. The whole question turned on how big a hold the other woman had on you. I didn't for an instant believe you'd thrown over Elinor to live by your-

self. To start with, you were nearly forty and you hadn't the sort of tastes a man of that age needs to fill up a bachelor life. Of course I asked you what it was all about but I could get nothing definite out of you. You were just sick of the whole thing, you neither knew nor cared what you did as long as you were free, whatever you meant by that. When I asked you if there was some other woman you cared for, you said there wasn't and you hoped there never would be again. You loathed women, they were a curse and all you wanted, the old shibboleth, was to be left in peace. To do what? To do nothing, just to be able to think. About nothing? Yes, about nothing. I said that was a very jolly idea and it didn't seem to be asking much. You replied that it was asking the most difficult thing one could ask and you never expected to get it. No, you had not yet told Elinor you intended leaving her, you were going to write her that night before you went to bed and you wished you had someone to send with the letter and bring you back your clothes. I told you I could lend you Ruggles and you were very much obliged. The next morning he went off with the letter. The morning after, the old man had a hæmorrhage and it was all over.

The less said about the next three days the better. I don't pretend, personally, to have felt it all very deeply. Any sentiment I ever had for

the governor had been worn out years before and my mind was almost entirely occupied with speculating as to how much he'd left and in what way he'd left it. I didn't agree with you when you said it would all be tied up. But you didn't seem to care one way or the other. You behaved much the same as when mother died, going about with your silk hat brushed the wrong way and looking as if it were your own funeral you were seeing about. I couldn't understand why you cared so much just at the end considering you and the governor never hit it off. There were moments when he and I understood each other because we were of the same kind in one way, the *canaille* side of him I mean. But there never was anything of that in you and your both having fussy, meticulous habits couldn't have brought you much together.

I got some fun out of watching the behaviour of the people at the funeral. That little bounder Anderson, now Lord Burcott, as sanctimonious as ever, sat in a pew close behind me and I could hear him singing "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom" a third above, like he used to in church at Walton Green when we were kids and went to stay with them. I rather liked the noble Viscount Yarrow (formerly Furnival) for saying "E'd 'ave lived ten years longer and 'ave left another quarter of a million if 'e 'adn't liked the tables so much."

After the coffin had been lowered into the grave, Uncle Fred stood looking down into it as though he had half a mind to jump in himself. You took hold of his arm and we all walked on through the cemetery. I was just behind and I saw Thistleton go up to him. The old man stood stock still, didn't look at him or say a word and the company promoter had to mooch on with his tail between his legs. He'd got the governor and Yarrow to buy that piece of land at Cap Ferras on a tontine basis, the survivor to take the lot, so he had a special interest in the funeral. That couldn't have exactly endeared him to Uncle Fred.

I suppose readings of wills are always beastly for somebody. You said it was indecent to read them, that nobody did that nowadays and that it ought to have been printed and circulated to the different members of the family. I must say I was rather looking forward to the excitement of it, it was like standing to win a cracker on a race, too like it as it turned out. Jephson seemed to enjoy his own interminable jargon and explaining how carefully he'd tied everything up. "The testator was very concerned that the capital should be protected in the most complete manner possible" he read, but when he reached the part when Nancy came in and there was no mention of Elinor, I saw him look over at you. Uncle Fred sat like a stone idol and you didn't seem to notice anything. It wasn't till the lawyer had

finished that you asked what provision had been made for your wife. Uncle Fred woke up suddenly and looked uneasily at Jephson, who, though he must have known perfectly well, looked the whole document through before answering, "I am afraid there is no provision, Mr. Richard."

For a moment you simply sat there, first staring at him, then at Uncle Fred. "No provision? Do you mean to say——?" You stood up and shook your finger at him. "That's your doing. It's an infamous will, infamous."

Jephson got as white as a sheet and looked appealingly at Uncle Fred. I could see the old man was very uncomfortable but when you went on repeating "It's a disgraceful will, an abominable will" he got angry. "You ought to be ashamed to say such things of your father's will."

"It isn't his will, it's that man's." You pointed at poor Jephson. "He'd never have made such a will, he'd never have left my wife unprovided for, he was incapable of vindictiveness."

The answer softened Uncle Fred. "I'm still there," he said. "Can't you trust to me?"

But you had worked yourself up. "No I can trust no one but myself. This has completed the ruin of my life" and you burst out of the room.

It certainly was a nasty jar. The capital was in the hands of the trustees but all of us except

you could appoint wife or husband to a half of the income at death. You must have known then, as you very soon admitted you did, that it was intentional on the old man's part, and that Jephson had no more to do with it than I had. But you had warmed to the former at the last and you tried, like he did, to humbug yourself. You went about like a madman repeating "She's left without a penny, to die in the gutter" as though it was you who were dead. "And to think" you almost sobbed to me "to think that I was going to throw her off, the only human being she's got in the world to protect her. Poor girl, she won't even know the governor's dead, there's a nice surprise in store for her."

That was you all over. As a matter of fact she did know because I wired her. I thought she ought to know and it would cheer her up, after she got your letter. It never entered my head that we should neither of us get a shilling of capital, and I'd taken it for granted you'd be able to provide for her all right. What's more, I'd had an answer telling me to take rooms at Claridge's and meet her there, doubtless she was expecting me at that very moment. When you said you were going off to the telegraph office at Charing Cross to telegraph her to ignore everything and come at once or you'd fetch her, I thought it was time to tell you. Your face beamed like a child's that's going to be given a

treat. "Well done, Tony, well done. You're a brick. Come on, let's go there at once."

"Hadn't you better see her alone first?"

"No, for God's sake come and help me. Think of what she's been through and now I've got to break this awful will to her."

I wasn't pleased with the will myself but it was rot talking as though you were a pauper.

I'd seen you pretty abject before but never to that point. To listen to you, one would have thought that you had spent the whole of your life committing a series of crimes for which Elinor was condemned to pay. Naturally she took the line you offered her and from that moment you jolly well had to toe it. Toeing the line in this case meant that you were going, all out, to fight for her at whatever cost. The first thing, you said, was to see Brinton and find out whether the will could be upset. We lunched together the next day and you told me Brinton said nothing could be done that would affect Elinor's position under the will, but it—"bristled with doubtful points" and in his opinion, you were entitled under it to the income of your settlements in addition to the income from your share of the estate. This was contrary to what Jephson had stated when he read the will. A few days later Brinton got Counsel's opinion which was dead in your favour.

Now here's where your peculiar mentality

came in. You didn't mind fighting Uncle Fred if you could benefit Elinor. You'd have upset ten wills if you could have ensured her getting an income when you were dead, but though it was twenty to one you could add a third to your own income while you were alive to enjoy it, by simply taking the matter into court, you refused to do it. "I don't want a shilling more than the governor meant me to have" you said and so you told Uncle Fred, but you demanded that he should undertake to give Elinor an adequate income at your death. He flatly declined and you said you'd take your own course. What that meant he didn't know, and nor did anyone else, including, I should think at that time, yourself.

XIV

MY own goings on in the months following the governor's death didn't affect you until much later. All I have to say about them is that they would have prevented me seeing much of you even if you hadn't kept your own doings dark. You were still living at Claridge's when Nancy and I dined one evening at Olivia's, and Leslie was full of mysterious hints about your having been backwards and forwards to Paris on some business. You know Leslie's way, one can never get anything definite out of him, but I knew he meant to suggest that you were on to something you expected to make a *coup* with. Olivia said she'd seen Elinor driving about in an electric coupé, as smart as ever, "of course with a man," and that she'd "condescended to bow." You had been to see her once or twice, looking very haggard, but you told her nothing and you wouldn't come to a meal without Elinor whom "she had no intention of inviting and who wouldn't have come if she had." That was all I knew. You never came into the Club which was the only place where we were at all likely to meet, and apparently you never went to

restaurants which by then Elinor had come to consider vulgar. You always loathed night-life so it was no use my ringing you up and asking you to supper. The only way I could see you was to go to Claridge's, so, one afternoon, I called there after I left the City. I thought it was time I knew what you were up to but I might have spared myself the trouble and gone to my bridge as usual. In answer to my enquiry, a message came down that Mr. Kurt had gone to Paris and that Mrs. Kurt was engaged. The snub direct. Evidently whatever you were doing, I was to be kept out of it.

At that time I used to go and see Uncle Fred every morning at the office, partly to ask him if he had any business for my firm but much more because it was important for me to keep on the right side of him. Uncle Fred had become very important to me and what was more he was becoming very important to a good many other people. Since the governor's death he had taken hold of the business and was running it for all it was worth, and in quite a different way, by cutting down the commission part of it and going in for underwriting and financing on a large scale. He had come to this through realising the governor's estate which left him with what he called "the rubbish." This "rubbish" was the speculative shares which had meanwhile gone up so much that they were worth about half a

you like can

million more than when the old man died. It was so like Uncle Fred, quietly to sneak that surplus by pretending it wasn't good enough to keep for the family trust. There's more to be said about that, a trifle of a hundred thousand pounds.

When I went up to see him he was either reading the "Times" or looking over the letters and telegrams. He sat in the same chair he'd always sat in, no one ever occupied the empty one on the opposite side of the big double writing-table. The only change was a photograph of the governor in an ebony and silver frame beside the inkstand. He never looked up when I came in. When I said good morning, he'd grunt and go on reading. I'd sit down, not in the governor's chair, and wait, twiddling my thumbs and smoking a cigarette till he said "What are so and so?" and when I told him "Buy or sell so many at such a price" or "Keep me informed." Just as I was going out of the door he'd ask if Nancy and the children were all right and very often "Heard anything of Richard?" When I said I hadn't; "I don't know what he's doing, he came to see me on Sunday mornings for a time when it suited him but he never told me anything then and I haven't seen him for a month. What's he doing, eh?" And he'd look at me over his glasses. I'd say, "I haven't the least idea." Another grunt. That meant "You're lying. You know, but you won't tell me."

You didn't see the first change in him after the governor's death because, when he refused to do anything for Elinor, you didn't go near him for at least three months and it was just during that time that it came. I've always thought your having taken the line you did had a good deal to do with it. At the beginning he seemed to be not exactly broken, but much older, he hardly said a word to anyone. The people at the office, especially Kahn and Bellows, were in an awful funk, they were certain he would liquidate the firm. He took no interest in anything. That only lasted a few weeks, the next stage began with the settling up of the estate. As it went on, he hardened up and as markets improved and stocks rose, he got harder. He didn't talk any more or look any more cheerful but he got keener and keener, came earlier and went later. Kahn and Bellows bucked up ; secretive as they tried to be, they admitted that they were doing a big business. Old Baron d'Alger was dead and his son, who was head of the firm, was always sitting in the old man's private office brewing up financial schemes. The name of W. K. & Co. was on most of the important prospectuses of new companies and there were comings and goings to Rothschilds, Morgans, Cassel, Speyers and all the big houses. It didn't take me long to see that Uncle Fred was out for the stuff as he'd never been before. He'd made up his mind to run the show in his own way

and now he was alone, he could do it. You remember the governor always said "Your Uncle never will sell." Kahn reminded me of that a few months later when the unsplit Tintos he'd bought at ten went to sixty.

You can imagine that Leslie's nose and ears were at work. He called me out of the house one day to tell me he'd just seen a man who'd seen a man, etc. etc. etc. "Cut it short, I'm busy" I said. His story was that Uncle Fred had been offered a million for his Daira Sanieh holding and had refused it. Meanwhile the old man sat there in the office, not turning a hair, only getting grumpier every day, and every day a bit harder. It was while all these things were happening that I told him about my visit to Claridge's and your having gone to Paris and for once he let fall a remark, "So I've heard." That was all, but the way he said it made me think he knew more about your business than I did, more than you knew he did, and more than he wished to tell me. That was no new thing to me, Uncle Fred always did know things when he wanted to, I'd often discovered that. There's another point I must put in here, that is that Uncle Fred cared more about you than about anyone else; he always had, just as you'd always cared about him. What you could find to be fond of in him, I never could understand. The governor did have a good side, at least he liked enjoying himself, gambling,

tarts and other things that are human. But Uncle Fred never liked anything that I could ever discover. You always made out he used to be different when we were younger. I say it's only when you come up against a man that you know what he's like and I only came up against Uncle Fred after the governor died, and I found him as hard as nails.

It must have been shortly after Uncle Fred said he'd heard you'd been in Paris that you wrote me you'd taken a flat in Park Lane. Elinor had told you of my having called while you were away and you wanted to see me. I turned up one Saturday morning when I wasn't going to the City and I knew Elinor would be in bed. I wanted to see you without her and find out how the land lay. A commissionaire opened the door the moment I'd rung, as though I'd come to a swagger Harley Street doctor's, and ushered me down a flight of stairs to a large room where two typists were hammering away, making an infernal row on their machines. One of them got up with a diary in her hand and asked me if I'd made an appointment. I couldn't resist teasing her a bit. "I must have made a mistake," I said, "and come to my dentist's instead of my brother's." She was a good-looking girl, and she smiled widely, showing a row of very regular glistening teeth. I hoped they were her own as she answered "Oh! I'll go and tell him" and disappeared

into an inner room where, through the half-open door, I saw you sitting at a table with a man I thought I knew by sight. You came out at once and asked me to wait a few minutes upstairs where it was more comfortable, but I proposed staying where I was. You glanced uneasily at the letters and papers that were strewn about the room as you went back to the inner sanctuary.

The typist, whose name I remember was Miss Stanley, gave me the "Times" and I sat down as close to her desk as I could and pretended to read it; in reality I was doing my best to see what she was typing. I couldn't make much of it, nor of the letters on her table and I had just time enough to see they had something to do with rubber when you came to the door with your visitor. I saw then he was a chap called Crawshay, one of that sort of broken-down men of family who always show up when there's a boom on in the City. He had owned race-horses, was a member of the Turf Club and knew everybody more or less, partly through his wife Lady Adela who was much hotter stuff than he was. The commissionaire appeared, to show him out and you signed to me to come into the inner room which was fixed up as a regular office, leather chairs and the rest of it. We'd hardly sat down before there was a knock on the door and Miss Stanley came in with a card. You looked

at the card and then at me, as though you were uncertain whether to send me out again or go yourself, but you decided for the latter and I got another chance of peeping at a paper covered with figures on your writing table. I saw it was the rough draft of a prospectus for "The Baralonga (Malaya) Rubber Estates." You came back into the room so quickly you couldn't help seeing me looking at it, so I didn't pretend I wasn't and you were rather sarcastic. "I see you don't need any information from me. You're providing yourself with it," or something of that sort. I said I knew you didn't mind my knowing anything you were doing, we never had any secrets from each other, to which you didn't respond very handsomely. On the contrary, you said something you intended to be nasty but which I took as rather complimentary, to the effect that it wouldn't be much use if you did mind as I should have no scruple about how I found it out. After which, we settled down for a chat, interrupted every few minutes by telephone messages or people coming to see you.

With what I saw and heard added to what you told me, I got to know more or less what you were up to and a pretty little game it was.

What concerned me was you were apparently quite unaware that you were horribly ill. Your face was green, your hands were so shaky that you could hardly hold a match to a cigarette,

you never stopped smoking, and thin as you always were, you'd become a skeleton. Your temples and cheeks were holes and your collar was two sizes too large for your neck. It was about eleven when I came and after I'd been with you a few minutes, your man came in with a tray. Of course I thought it was a whisky and soda which I was quite ready for myself, but it was nothing so salubrious. A cup of black coffee and a squat-looking bottle with something in it that looked like sand or brown sugar. You shovelled two teaspoonfuls of it into the coffee and drank it down. I looked at the bottle. Bengler's Mathé. "What's that muck?" I asked you.

"Wonderful stuff," you said. "Pulls one together. I'm working eighteen hours out of the twenty-four and I must keep going till I'm out of the wood."

I'd never heard of Bengler's Mathé, but one had only to look at your face to know that, if it was keeping you going, it would have something to answer for before long. I knew it wasn't any use saying anything. You never took advice from anyone, certainly not from me. Besides, you wouldn't have listened. You were up to the neck in this business of yours and were thinking of nothing else. I'm bound to say you seemed to know very well what you were about. I had never known you so clear-brained and on the

spot. I could judge that by the way you telephoned and dictated letters which, once you'd accepted my knowing what you were doing, you went on while I was there. You even saw several people with me sitting in the room and I must honestly say I was knocked by the way you handled them and so, I could see, were they. Where you got it all from, how you had managed in a few months to work the thing up to the point you had, I couldn't understand, and I never did afterwards. I knew you'd had some training under Uncle Theo as a boy and that short innings of yours with W. K. & Co., but that was quite a different sort of thing to this company-promoting stunt you were so at home with.

You wanted me to go up to the flat and have lunch with you and Elinor. You said you never ate any yourself, you had a glass of vodka and a biscuit, then coffee and some more Bengler. You had to ask people who were mixed up in your business to lunch and it was about the only time you saw Elinor. I hadn't any particular wish to see her, though I wasn't really down on her. But it certainly was on her account that you were driving yourself so hard and, while I didn't expect her to be your guardian angel, I felt she might have done something to head you off from complete collapse. So I had a whisky and soda and departed, thinking to myself that it was pretty safe betting that if you won your stake

you wouldn't be there very long to enjoy the proceeds and that was the sort of double event I had no mind to help Elinor to pull off.

The only person who might be able to do something was Uncle Fred. It was a filthy foggy evening and he was in a filthier temper when I called at Mount Street. The only chance of seeing him was after eight as he always played bridge at the Club till the last moment before dressing time, and then rushed off to take "Auntie" Fullerton to dinner. I had an engagement to dinner myself and I'd been waiting ten minutes for him in that beastly little room he always used, although there were four others in the flat.

"What's the matter now?" were his first words.

I should have liked to tell the old blighter that if he thought I'd come for the pleasure of seeing him, he was in error. I didn't, but it consoled me that if I didn't get any thanks, I at least should be able to make him feel uncomfortable. "I've come to see you about Richard," I said.

"Well? Well?" he snarled, while his man helped him on with his coat. "Can't you be quick?"

He stuck his glasses on the end of his nose and began opening a pile of letters on the table, never glancing at me as usual.

"He's ill," I said.

"Eh? Ill? What d'you mean, ill?" He put the letter he was looking at back on the pile and did look at me then over his glasses.

"I said ill," I repeated, and I rubbed it in again, "in my opinion very ill, but he doesn't know he is."

He got angrier. "How d'you mean, doesn't know? If he's ill, he must know."

"Well, he doesn't. He's working at high pressure, he doesn't give himself a chance of thinking about anything else."

"Working—at what I should like to know? You neither of you know the meaning of work."

I longed to say something rude. I didn't get angry easily but it was galling, having the truth told me in such an unpleasant way and I cast about for an answer that would rile him. "Anyhow, if making money is a proof of industry, he's working all right now. He'll make a hundred thousand pounds in the next few weeks."

"Bosh!"

"Bosh, if you like, I happen to know." This was his own expression.

"How?"

His servant announced the car.

"That would take time to explain and you're in a hurry."

He pulled out his watch.

"Go on, can't you? I've got five minutes."

"He's got options on rubber properties and

he's forming a company. It's only a matter of underwriting, and he's got the promises. But I don't believe he can see it through, he'll break down." I stopped there, I'd gone far enough.

"Well, what am I to do? I can't help his breaking down, can I?"

His voice had changed, I knew I'd got him.

"You could see him. You're the only person he pays any attention to."

He stared at me. "How you can say that, I can't understand. You know perfectly well that ever since your father's death he's done everything he possibly could in opposition to me."

"It's all Elinor. He doesn't want to."

"It will always be the same, I tell you. That woman has been the ruin of him and I dare say she will kill him. What am I to do?"

"I know what I should do if I were in your place."

"What?"

"I'd take over his rubber properties."

Uncle Fred faced round at me. His face got as red as a lobster, he fairly bristled with rage, "Are you mad? I take over his lousy rubbish and help him to make a fortune against my wishes so that he can spend it on that woman who influenced him against his own father and mother?"

I put on my hat and went to the door. "Well, I've told you the state he's in," I said.

He followed me along the passage and down the stairs to the front door where his car was waiting. "Get in," he said, on the pavement.

"I'm going to the Carlton. Does that suit you?"

"Carlton," he told the man without answering me and didn't speak till we got there. I was just getting out and had opened the door.

"If you've got any influence with your brother, tell him to give it all up."

"If he does, will you see him through?"

"Yes. If he does what I tell him."

"All right." But I wondered what I was going to do and what I was going to get out of it.

XV

THE next morning I came to the conclusion that I'd been in too much of a hurry. I'd had a late night. Hugo Manners took me on at pool after dinner. From sovereigns we got to betting fivers on strokes, and we finished up with chemmy at Perrier's. Very expensive, and it came on the top of a rotten bad National. Things were getting thick with me and the more I thought about your business, the less I liked the line I'd taken. Perhaps you weren't nearly so bad as you looked and even if you were, you must have someone you could fall back on to pull off your scheme. There was Brinton for one. And if it came off, I knew, when you cashed in, I could count on you for a leg up I badly needed, whereas, if you went down, there wouldn't be a rupee coming from the old man. It was Sunday morning and I'd just about decided I'd go and see you and tell you what I'd done when there was a ring on the telephone. It was Herbert Thal. He said he'd been dining with you the previous evening, you'd got a little business together, and would I lunch quietly with him at his flat, in Pall Mall? There was something he wanted

to say to me. Righto. That was a bit of luck. If anyone could help me out at this particular moment, it was Herbert Thal.

As soon as I saw him, he began about your looking so ill. He knew you'd told me about your scheme and he explained how he came in through getting half the capital underwritten in Paris. If Herbert said he'd do it, it was done, that much was certain. But he hardly talked about the business, you know his way of treating a thing as quite a small affair. He wanted to know what was the matter with you or rather he asked me if I knew. When I said I didn't he remarked "He's doping."

It was no use my humbugging. "He doesn't know he is," I said. "Richard's a mug. He's got no idea that stuff's dope."

He talked it over and we both came to the conclusion some woman in Paris had put you on to it. It wasn't for some time after that I knew of your affair with Susie. I'd known her with him at his flat in the Rond Point from the first and I knew you went there a good deal though you always were dark about everything that hit you hard. She was just the kind to dope and of course the poor little thing died of it.

Herbert Thal's mistress was in love with you ; whether you were with her I don't know and it doesn't affect the result. He, of course, had no idea what was going on, perhaps he wouldn't

have much cared if he had, he was having plenty of affairs on his own. She gives you the dope, he takes on your business and makes a cert of it.

Now Herbert was a mysterious kind of cove with no end of irons in the fire that very few people knew anything about. I always believed he was a kind of financial secret service agent, at any rate there wasn't much going on in the finance line in Paris or London, or New York for that matter, that he didn't know about. He never seemed to have anything to do except amuse himself but he always had money to throw to the birds and, while he was financing your scheme in Paris, he had a very much larger show on with Uncle Fred. But he didn't tell you that and he didn't tell me. All he seemed to be concerned about was your doping and whether my uncle knew how ill you were. And of course, I more or less told him what had taken place the evening before and asked his advice as to what I should do next.

"Leave it to me," he said. "Do nothing. I'll fix it."

Fix it he did.

I didn't see you during the next days. I was getting into a tighter and tighter place and my work was cut out to keep my head above water till your scheme went through. I counted on Herbert's seeing to that after what he'd said. It might

have been anything from ten days to a fortnight later that Ada came over to spend a few weeks in London with us. She said she'd seen you in Paris looking too ghastly for words. You hadn't had any sleep for several nights owing to your sitting up with a friend who had been ill. The friend had died and she saw you the day after the funeral. Afterwards, of course, I knew that was Susie. She said you were fearfully depressed, that you told her everything had gone to pot and you didn't know what you were going to do after you got back to London.

The next day she rang you up at Park Lane and finding you were back, she asked you to come to the Opera with her. I told her I didn't think it would cheer you up much to go to La Tosca, but to my surprise you accepted. When she came back she told Nancy and me it had been quite a success. You had sat next a girl she knew, she had introduced you to her and you'd talked to her the whole evening. That girl was Myrtle. How little I imagined then what Myrtle was going to be to you. At the time I was only thinking about your scheme and I was saying to myself that if you had bucked up it was probably all right after all. The next morning I telephoned to ask you when I could see you. Miss Stanley answered. You'd got someone with you and couldn't be disturbed. As soon as I got to the City I went up to see

Uncle Fred but I couldn't go into the private room. Bellows told me there was a gentleman with Mr. Frederick and he couldn't be disturbed either. With the traditional secretiveness of the Kurt firm, he wouldn't tell me who it was. I sat down in the outer office and waited. It suddenly came into my head to see who came out by the side door, so I got up and went outside and walked up and down in the corridor. I waited what seemed a damned long time till the door opened and out came Thal.

"Hullo, Herbert," I said, but he was in a devil of a hurry, just touched my hand and disappeared down the stairs. I went into the old man's room. There he sat, pretending to be buried in the "Times," neatly folded in a square on the table, squinting through his glasses on the end of his ugly nose, and making that disgusting noise as he puffed out the smoke from his cigarette. The usual grunt in answer to my good morning, the usual silence. It got on my nerves. What could I think of to roust him up?

"I saw Herbert Thal coming out."

Silence.

"Queer chap. Didn't know you knew him."

Silence.

"Suppose he's put that business through with Dick unless you've queered it."

That got him. His glasses fell off his nose on the paper and he looked up angrily.

"Queered it, what d'you mean by talking to me like that? What's your brother's business got to do with me?"

"You wanted him to chuck it, didn't you?"

"Certainly I did—for his own sake, after you told me it was making him ill."

"I didn't say the business was making him ill. I said I was afraid he would be too ill to see it through."

He put his glasses on his nose and turned over the paper. "You were right for once. He is too ill and——"

He stopped short and there was silence again. But I hadn't had enough. I was in a mood to ask for trouble. If your business had gone fut, my game was up and I didn't care what happened.

"Herbert Thal told me himself he was doing half the underwriting in Paris and that he could do the rest here if Dick wanted him to. It couldn't go down unless you meant it to."

He took up the "Times" and smashed it down on the table, his face set like a steel trap. "Leave my office," he shouted. "I've had enough of your impertinence, and don't come to me again when you're in trouble. You and your brother too have been a constant source of—of—anxiety—of—of—trouble—of—of——" he spluttered with rage, unable to get the words out.

The sight of his angry, inflamed face made me

feel better. But I was going to have a last shot. "All I can say is, if you've done Dick in, we'll make you pay for it between us."

He took a good look at me, his eyes followed me as I went slowly to the door. "You're a blackguard," he said and as I closed it, I murmured sweetly, "Thanks so much."

I didn't care if I never saw the old swine again, but it was a serious matter to quarrel with him. I'd reached a point where thousands would soon be needed to save me from an everlasting smash. I could tide it over a while longer, but if you went down, there was only that vindictive old money-grubber between me and the deluge. As I went down the stairs, I was asking myself whether he would let me go when it came to it; I still had a card that might save the trick. That card was the boy. Whatever I did, I'd always made it a point with Nancy that she should keep on good terms with the governor who thought a lot of her and adored the children. That would have been enough of itself to make the other follow suit. But in addition, since the old man's death, I'd seen to it that Nancy kept it up with Uncle Fred and she took the kids to see him regularly, besides having him to dinner quite often at Northumberland Place, on which occasions I had made a show of being a respectable *pater familias*. I'd also pretended not to notice, and given her strict injunctions to

ignore, his little peculiarities. My policy had resulted in his forming the habit of her and the children as I expected he would. In his case, habit was a substitute for affection which I always told you he was incapable of feeling. The children, especially the boy, had taken a place in his life, and it was fairly sure that they entered into all his calculations. Someone would have to inherit the millions he was piling up and it would be in keeping with his ideas to tie them up as long as possible. When one considered that the boy was his beloved brother's grandson and the only one of our name in that generation and that under the governor's will he inherited the residue of his estate, what more likely than that old Uncle Fred would let his accumulation follow the lead given by the only human being he had ever been capable of caring for? If my notion was sound, I'd still got the old blighter on toast. If he played rough on me, I'd take damned good care that, whatever happened, the boy shouldn't save his stake for him.

All that might be right enough so far as the future was concerned but it was no solution of present difficulties. What I wanted to know was how you stood. I made up my mind to see you at once and immediately after lunch I went to Park Lane. A maid opened the door and showed me into the drawing-room above. Elinor, in an elaborate *négligée*, lay extended on the

sofa, with her head sunk in a luxurious pile of silk pillows and a huge gold-mounted bottle of smelling salts in one pale hand ; a fiery-haired, scrawny woman with red lips was sitting in an arm-chair beside her, drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette. They'd evidently just finished lunch. My arrival was, of course, unexpected and Elinor was not gushing in her welcome. She didn't introduce me to the other woman but I knew she was Lady Adela Crawshay from our both frequenting race-courses, and we immediately began discussing horses and odds. I see that this annoyed Elinor and it wasn't any good to me ; the woman knew nothing about racing and I hadn't come there for that. I switched on to you and asked Elinor whether I could see you. You'd gone to Ireland, she answered.

" To Ireland ? " I repeated.

" Yes, to stay with his friend Clarissa Mallory." She and the other exchanged one of the silly grins that women think significant but which are only feebly malevolent.

Elinor was sorry if I particularly wanted to see you as you wouldn't be back for a week. You'd gone away last night, you complained of sleeping badly. Miss Stanley, who was downstairs, could probably tell me more than she could, she was more in your confidence. Elinor's tone was heavily sarcastic.

I went down to see Miss Stanley, who was buried under masses of papers and very discreet. I didn't get much out of her, she parried some leading questions though I could see she knew what there was to know. There was nothing for it but to wait till you returned.

I went upstairs to say good-bye and found Elinor still reclining, but alone, so I sat down again. Was there anything I specially wanted to see you about? I didn't know how much I ought to tell her or how much she knew herself. I said there were several things I wanted to talk over with you; I was surprised you'd gone away as I thought you were in the thick of an important business. So you were but you had to hang up everything for a few days while Crawshay went to Paris, that was all she knew. I saw she was telling the truth so I dropped further questions and began talking to her about things in general.

"What a charming flat this is."

"I'm glad you think so. It's in vile taste."

I looked round. It was a large room with big bow windows, very expensively furnished and decorated with silk panels.

"Don't you long for the villa?"

"What's the use of longing for it? Heaven knows when I shall see it again, now Richard's mad on business."

You mad on business! That was the limit.

"He's only working for one coup," I said, "and he wouldn't have done that except for you."

"Ah! for me, as usual. And if he fails, it will be my fault too, I suppose."

"Don't be so huffy, dear. All I meant was that if he knew you were all right, he wouldn't go on."

"Oh dear no. He doesn't want anything himself, does he? He's got such inexpensive tastes, Clarissa for example."

That was a nasty one. I broke fresh ground. "He was looking awfully seedy when I saw him last."

"Is that surprising? He does nothing but drink and smoke and he's out all night."

"Richard was never much of a one for night-life, I know that."

She sat up and leant forward to emphasise her words. "You don't know and I don't know what Richard does, what he thinks or what he wants. No one knows Richard, least of all his wife and after that, his family. All I can tell you is, his bed has not been slept in for weeks."

This was certainly news to me. "What do you make of that?" I asked her.

"I don't make anything. All I know is that he disappears downstairs after dinner whenever I'm in, and that I don't see him again till lunch time the next day. He says he can't sleep in this

flat. I've hardened myself to his way of going on. Fortunately I've got my own friends."

I was wondering where the devil you went, I couldn't make it out and I was going to ask her another one or two questions when Amezaga was shown in. He came lounging into the room with his silk hat and a gardenia in his button-hole, kissed her hand and slid into an arm-chair; he'd got a book under his arm. If there was a man in London I couldn't stand, it was Manoel Amezaga. His mixture of society, sport and intellectual poppycock made me sick. I'd often heard that women loved his conversation, evidently Elinor was one of them.

I suppose it was a week later that you telephoned me to come round and see you. I was shown straight into your room downstairs and you told me at once you'd thrown up the sponge. Thal had gone back on you and left you to find the Paris undertaking. You'd felt too ill to go to Paris yourself and had sent Crawshay who had failed to persuade the people to whom you sent him, to come in. You'd hoped a week in Ireland would pick you up but you weren't any better, in fact you were worse. You simply couldn't concentrate your mind. When you tried to telephone or write a letter, your head spun. It was no good going on, you'd been to Brinton and he'd seen Uncle Fred who had presented an ultimatum. You were to hand over all your

options to him and step down and out. On these conditions he'd meet your paper and liquidate your position. And you had accepted.

It was what I expected after I saw that old devil; a few questions and it was as clear as daylight to me. Of course you refused to believe you'd been sold all round. Sold by Thal, sold by Crawshay, sold by Uncle Fred. Uncle Fred had made Thal a proposition, Thal knew you couldn't find the calls on the options unless you got the underwriting. All he had to do was to back out and square Crawshay when he went over to Paris. Uncle Fred having squeezed you out handed over the options to Thal, with whom he made his terms, while he was diddling you with his "wouldn't touch your 'lousy' rubber."

How much his whack out of the loot was over and above what was needed to repay his outlay on liquidating your position, we shall never know. Quite a slick little deal. O, my giddy aunt, what a mug you were. But that wasn't the worst. You refused to see it, you defended the old bloodsucker. You were mad with me for believing him capable of doing just exactly what it was his nature to do, not only his nature, but his pleasure, his sport, the thing he lived for. And it was as much as I could do to persuade you to put me down among your liabilities for a measley few thousands, just to keep me going a bit longer, when all you had to do was to tell

Brinton you owed Klein or Behrend or any of your bill discounters as much more within reason as you liked. We could just as easily have cut up twenty thousand between us. How much do you think Frederick Kurt and Thal made between them when Baralonga Malaya pound shares went to six. Do you see the old skinflint selling when he was on the inside and knew that the Dunlop group were all round them and would have to buy?

"You're utterly wrong, Tony. Uncle Fred's the best friend I ever had, perhaps the only one. He may go the wrong way to work but all he wants is to save me."

"Oh my aunt! Oh my celestial brother! Oh my shining Don Quixote! All he wanted was to save you! Well, saving you was damned good business."

XVI

THE camel had got about as much as he could carry. Elinor of course piled her reproaches on to the top of the load and if they weren't the last straw, they were near enough to it to force a decision upon you you'd have otherwise been incapable of taking in your demoralised condition. I say Elinor's behaviour settled you, but it wasn't directly that. There was another and much stronger influence, though I was too occupied with my own affairs to notice it at the time, in spite of certain things I clearly remember your telling me.

One evening at the little club in Dover Street stands out. It was a day or two after Whitsun and I'd been racing. You'd been down to Folkestone and we dined together. I noticed a change in you at once, you'd got calmer and you spoke out about Elinor in a way you never had before. You said it had come to what you called a parting of the ways, that you'd done your best to make money against every instinct and taste you had, against what you believed were your own interests, but you'd failed and there was an end of it. You'd never try again and she

knew now that you'd had enough of that sort of life. Uncle Fred had given you an assurance that if anything happened to you, he'd give her an adequate annuity and she'd have to put up with that and what you could leave her. The villa and its contents were worth a good bit and your life was insured for a substantial amount. You had made up your mind to travel for six months and during that time you'd decide whether you'd live with her again or not. Meanwhile you were going to allow her half your income. I said that was preposterous but you were adamant about it. As long as she was your wife she had her end to keep up, she had to have a flat or house somewhere after the Park Lane let was finished and she must be able to live at the villa if she liked. That was your ridiculous way of looking at it, and I saw it was no use arguing. Then we started on my affairs. We sat talking in the corner of the old dining-room and drank two bottles of Pommery 1900 and a lot of old brandy.

It wasn't till we went upstairs that you told me what had taken you down to Folkestone, and as I look back I can't imagine how I could have been such a fool as not to see where you had found your unusual firmness. Until then you had only seen Myrtle Vendramin three times, at the Opera with Ada, when you called on her sister Beryl Stone and again at the Opera with

both sisters. They had told you they were going to Folkestone and Beryl had suggested your coming. I suppose another reason why I didn't attach importance to Myrtle then was that you never talked about anything that was close to you. I realised afterwards that the reason you spoke freely about her was that you thought of her as utterly removed from you, as one who never could be more than a friend. You said you had never known anyone in the least like her before but when I asked you what was so different about her, you couldn't explain or at all events not in a way I could understand. Afterwards you told me she didn't talk much but she didn't have to talk because you knew what she was thinking, that her silences were eloquent ; it was like being with someone you'd always known and who knew all about you. I'm not given to accepting that sort of talk as a rule but, I can't explain why, the way you spoke about her made me accept it. You didn't connect her in any way with yourself, you spoke of her as though, very likely, you'd never see her again. At the time it gave me the idea that it was just an experience you'd had of a woman you might have cared for but whose life was entirely removed from your own. I had met Beryl Stone once or twice, a pretty coquettish little woman, who was always dashing about and never seemed to have time to do more than

smile before she was off again but I didn't know she had a sister, in fact, I didn't know what her name was before she married Rudolf Stone.

I don't think I saw you again before you went, about a week later. I got a postcard from you from Vienna and one from Constantinople. During those months my affairs went from bad to worse, the two or three thousand you managed to mop up for me when you were settling were a drop in the ocean. Something had to be done, I put myself at it as I never had before. To go to Uncle Fred was out of the question. If he let me go bankrupt the trustees would have to pay my income to Nancy so she and the children would be all right anyhow. My liabilities could go hang. All I cared about was to raise a decent lump of ready. You know how I pulled it off and you admitted that to persuade a highly respectable firm of private bankers to advance me twenty thousand pounds against no security was a clever performance. By the time you were in Cairo, I was in Monte Carlo and a couple of months later you came on to Paris.

I had a few lines from you from Naples and wired you to come ; I wanted to talk over plans with you. I'd bought a couple of handicap horses and had about made up my mind to go into a racing partnership with a cute American called Van Wyck who knew how to make it pay. So far, I'd managed to keep things going in

London and if I could land a good stake or two, I could retrieve my position. When you wired back you couldn't come, I wouldn't take no for an answer and insisted, telling you I absolutely needed your advice. A fat lot of good that was to me when I got it. You disapproved of everything I was doing and proposed to do, and assured me that I should inevitably go bust. According to you my only chance of salvation was to go back and make terms with the old man. I told you I'd see him in hell first. I'd got plenty of ready to go on with, I was having a jolly good time, and the future could take care of itself. I always believed in eating my cake while I'd got it.

When first I saw you I thought you looked fitter than you'd been for years; you'd done a lot of riding in the desert while you were at Luxor and the brown hadn't worn off, but underneath it you were in a rotten state. You hardly slept at all and you'd lost all spirit. Nothing amused you. I did my best to cheer you up, introduced you to all the pretty women and so on, but you had nothing to say to them. All you did was to walk about the streets and spend endless hours in the museums. Not that they did you any good either. You'd seen and done all there was to see and do at Vienna, Pesth, Constantinople and in Egypt, but the trip, so far from having pulled you together, had been

a complete wash-out. You'd kept a sort of journal of your experiences in two big copy-books which you seemed to consider very important documents. You weren't at all keen to show them to me but I persuaded you to let me look over them. I didn't keep them long. Apparently you had got on the inside track of things in various places, especially in Constantinople and you were down upon everybody. You found nothing but greed and lies and intrigue everywhere; anyone would have thought you went away on your travels expecting to find nothing but kindergartens and saints. I never read such tosh. Even Egypt came in for it; according to your gospel it was a dumping ground for the vulgarest trash in Europe and America and the only decent people there were the Arabs. You were at your old game of world reforming. Funny kind of hobby.

After a couple of days you said you'd go back to Naples where you'd felt better than anywhere else. You told me what your life there was and if you liked that, there was no accounting for tastes. All I could make out was that you'd made friends with the family of the *concierge* of a sort of *maison-de-passe*, a widow and two young daughters, and that you'd almost lived with them. You said it suited you because they were up all night and slept during the day. You seemed to have got a morbid interest out of

the people who frequented the place and the contrast between them and your young *concierge* girls who waited on them. I remember a yarn about a woman being nearly murdered and another about an English girl who died in the beastly place. I tried to convince you that it couldn't do you any good to go back there again. You quite agreed but you said anything was better than your old life with Elinor; you'd rather shoot yourself and have done with it. I'd known fellows in a low state before when they'd been going it and were broke but a case like yours was beyond me. You had all the money you wanted, you were free to do what you liked. You only had to write Elinor you didn't intend to go back to her and tell Brinton to arrange a proper separation. But you couldn't make up your mind to that either, all you seemed able to do was to drift. It wasn't as though you were drinking or doping, you drank next to nothing and you'd given up that mathé muck before you left England. In fact, from what you told me, I believe the explanation of your breakdown over the rubber business was your stopping mathé suddenly, not knowing it was dope. Anyhow your things were packed and you were to leave for Naples the next evening.

The following morning you came into my room; I'd had a late night and wasn't any too pleased to be woke up. You had changed your mind and

were going to London after all. "Good God!" I said and turned over.

You weren't shirty, you said you quite understood my being disgusted but there was nothing for it but that—for the time being. Something in the way you spoke struck me, and I pulled myself together to have a look at you. You were dressed and ready to go and I saw at once that there was something changed about you. "What's happened?" I asked.

You held out a letter. "I've had this from Myrtle Vendramin."

I can't remember the letter exactly, but it was evidently in answer to one you'd written and it went something like this:

"DEAR KURT,

I shall certainly see you as soon as you come to London. I will do anything I can to help you.

Yours,

MYRTLE VENDRAMIN."

What happened when you got to London I don't know. It couldn't have been more than two or three weeks later that I got a letter from you telling me that Elinor had started divorce proceedings and that you were going to marry Myrtle.


XVII

IN spite of your forebodings, my racing enterprise did me uncommonly well, well enough to put me on my feet and clear off all my pressing debts. I could run the one to the bank indefinitely as an overdraft by paying in my income and things were looking fairly healthy when I came back to England and you and Myrtle met me at Folkestone. I couldn't understand why you found it so difficult to describe her appearance. It seemed to me easy enough. She struck me as exceedingly smart, but not self-consciously, like Elinor. She was wearing the right kind of tailor suit, white with a black satin stock, and a soft velour hat. I judged her to be about twenty-five, much too young for you I thought, although you looked ten years younger than when you were in Paris. But if I couldn't see any difficulty in describing her appearance, I certainly did in sizing her up. One can nearly always hit off a woman's character and disposition more or less, if not at the first glance, very soon afterwards. I never found it difficult to get on the right side of women when I wanted to. My plan was to spot the weakness,

which is always there though it may not be in evidence, and to make it my strong suit. They run pretty nearly true to type and the touchstone for all of them is flattery direct or indirect.

But I couldn't fit Myrtle into any type I knew and, though I had a good try, I failed to get on to any weakness. She saw through flattery or even conciliation, I tumbled to that at once. Besides, there was no object in either because she was ready from the start to see things from my point of view and to meet me more than half-way. I knew I shouldn't try to humbug her, not only because she'd see through it but because she made me feel she was an ally who wanted nothing at all for herself.

If I had been asked what I noticed about her most at first, I suppose I should have said her naturalness and a sort of unruffableness. From the first moment when she met me as I stepped off the boat and kissed her, I was reminded of what you'd said. It was as if she'd known me always and what was more, as though she quite approved of me. She wasn't in the least gushing, rather the reverse, it was something in the expression of her face when I spoke to her. I stayed the night at Folkestone and we three had a long talk but on my way up to town I realised that it had been nearly all about your and my affairs and that I didn't know her any the better for it. I liked old Mr. Vendramin and his



autocratic ways. He reminded me of mother in the way he walked about as though he owned the hotel and behaved as though it was everybody's business to make things easy and comfortable for him. How I laughed over the two fowls he had sent to the hotel daily from Brighton. Why Brighton? I knew the name Vendramin. They were a numerous and well-known family. One was at Eton with me, one was on the Stock Exchange and another kept some race-horses.

The point I wanted specially to clear up while I was with you and that I knew nothing about, was Uncle Fred's behaviour about your divorce. According to you and Myrtle, he had backed you from the first moment you told him about it and it was thanks to him it had gone so smoothly. There had been no question of money beyond his agreeing that "when the time came" he would enable you to settle an "adequate income" upon Elinor. You said that was all you wanted beyond the much more important matter of his "moral support," whatever you meant by that. Personally I wouldn't give a blind man's pat for anyone's "moral support" about anything, least of all his. Why you should care a bean for his approval unless there was money with it, I couldn't understand and I said so. That made Myrtle laugh but neither she nor you explained it. As you were both perfectly charmed with the old blighter's blessings and his

pie-crust promises, there was nothing more to be said.

Olivia, whom I saw in London the next day, had completely accepted your divorce and remarriage and was very pleased about it. She knew Myrtle slightly and said she was a sweet girl, and she was sure she would make you happy, which didn't mean much to me; those phrases never do. I wanted to know what sort of woman Myrtle really was; what she'd got in her head when she said she'd marry you. I knew your good points if anyone did, but I didn't see why a remarkably attractive, well-off girl should marry a rather worn-out divorced man of forty with no money he could settle on her, no position and no prospects.

Olivia could offer no explanation and Leslie who had, of course, been making snob-worthy enquiries on his own account was as baffled as I was. "Do you think it's the old man's money?" He gave me one of his little soft nudges. "He might have told Dick he'd make him his heir if he got divorced and married a nice girl. What do you think, Tony?"

"I think you're a bloody fool" I said.

We saw very little of each other during the whole year you were being divorced. Of course, you were living a very quiet life, as different from mine as it could be and I was away a good deal in Paris and elsewhere. But the true

reason was that Myrtle simply absorbed you from the beginning. No one else really existed for you after you got engaged to her. You couldn't become Siamese twins until you were married but you were as near to it as you could get. From that time on we only came together when something happened on my side ; on yours, you didn't need me and you got further and further away from me and from everything that had ever been in your life before. I don't say this as a reproach, it was bound to be so. With Myrtle it was a case of all or nothing ; she didn't mean to share you with anyone and, when she wanted something, it happened. I don't think you saw Olivia more than half a dozen times until you were divorced and remarried. There was no estrangement, she liked and admired Myrtle against whom even Leslie had nothing to say but Olivia told me she didn't seem able to get at you. When you went there to dinner, the evening passed off delightfully, we were all on good terms with each other ; then you and Myrtle melted away and we knew nothing more until we saw you again perhaps six weeks or two months later.

The only member of the family you saw regularly was Uncle Fred. You and Myrtle always went to see him on Sundays and now and then I met you there. Myrtle hit it off with him in an extraordinary way. When she was there,

his manner changed, he seemed to try to be genial and was even polite to me; the atmosphere had all at once become bearable. It was some time during that year you began calling him "The Rock," I don't know whether it was you or Myrtle christened him that. I'd gradually got fairly friendly with him again and though I never knew it for certain, I believe that was through Myrtle. But I didn't feel any different towards him. He was getting richer and richer. There were certain things Leslie had a way of finding out. A man in the City who had something to do with the Income Tax told him Frederick Kurt was worth three millions.

Whenever I did see you, I talked to you chiefly about him or rather about his money and what he was going to do with it. That interested you as little as everything else I was concerned with. You said he'd done all you wanted him to do which was to give the necessary guarantee for your divorce covenant with Elinor and for your marriage settlement on Myrtle and you didn't care what he did with his money. I did. It was the most important thing in my life, bar the boy, and your indifference removed the one interest we might still have had in common.

That was about how we stood towards each other when you married Myrtle and came over to Paris on your honeymoon. No one could have been sweeter to me than she was, then and

always. She made me feel she had the utmost good-will towards me, that if there was anything she could do to back me up in any way, whether by influencing you to do me a turn or by putting in a good word for me with that damnable old man, she would love to do it. But there it ended. There was simply nothing to bring us nearer to each other and as you were part of her, as you saw everything with her eyes and felt everything as she felt it, we were bound to drift more and more apart. What you intended to do with your life was a mystery to me. Myrtle and her family were musical and they knew all the musical celebrities. What could that mean to you who knew no more about music than I did? One of her sisters was well known in literary circles, her name was Irene Cane. Myrtle saw a good deal of her but what could you get out of that? I knew you'd done a certain amount of reading but you weren't the sort of man to make a hobby of literature. Can you be surprised that I wondered what the result of this last and greatest obsession of all was going to be?

About the time you came back from your honeymoon in Venice, The Rock founded and endowed The Kurt Home for Incurables to the tune of a hundred and fifty thousand of the best. I knew where that had come from. It was a part and only a small one at that, of about as bare-faced a bit of robbery as even he ever pulled off,

when he took over what he was pleased to call "the rubbish" at the governor's death. Everything was in his hands and he could do what he liked. He damned well did. There was the further item of a hundred thousand handed over by W.K. to save death duties, "for the benefit of the boys" presumably at Uncle Fred's discretion. You and Myrtle seemed to think it rather a joke when I told you how I found it all out; she said I had a mania about him and his money and that I could talk of nothing else. I'm as ready to see the funny side of things as anyone but I failed to see anything uproariously humorous in our being robbed of thousands a year to make a halo for that damned old hypocrite. The only person whom I could get to see him more or less as he was, and then only at times, was Leslie. He was rather useful to me now and then in picking up bits of news about him or working out a scent when I put him on the line.

Leslie was one of those utter fools who think they're rather cunning and I was able to use him without his knowing it. It was through Leslie's finding out that The Rock was on the buy that I managed to stand in with Widger over the deal at Newmarket spring sales when The Rock bought Peer Gynt and Coyte. Of course he'd had a few horses in training for years but he only began racing seriously the year you were being divorced; his winning the big

handicap at Kempton, the autumn before, started him, and by the spring he had a dozen decent horses in training. He won the Oaks the spring you were married and from then on his head began to swell. I was watching him pretty closely and I played up to it for all I was worth. Every now and then there would be a note in the paper about the well-known millionaire philanthropist Mr. Frederick Kurt and his Home for Incurables or there would be a snapshot of him at Newmarket or Sandown. I always made a point of cutting them out and sending them to him. And I worked the ladies. When an old buffer like that gets going, the girls are always ready. It was about then Trixie and I clicked, and you know what a good sort she always was. I made a real pal of her from the start and told her everything. I made it my job to keep track of The Rock, and as Trixie was in the thick of the show business it was easy as shelling peas for her little pals to get him in tow. Little did he suppose that I knew all about those little dinners in private suites at the Savoy, those little flittings to Mount Street, and off again in the small hours. Though, all the time, he was piling up money and living the life of a *vieux marcheur*, he was getting harder and harder to everyone else. He knew I could scarcely keep my head above water but it never occurred to him to give me a leg up. I knew, if

the bank called in my loan, I could expect no mercy from him. Is it any wonder that my dislike of him turned into hatred? There he sat like a great spider in a corner of its web watching for a fly to get caught, darting out and sucking its blood and then back to the corner to begin over again.

Whenever I saw you and Myrtle, I talked about him but I couldn't make you see him as I did. You always defended him and everything he did, and when I told you about his contemptible mangy tricks, Myrtle laughed in that soft way of hers. I began to get suspicious, at least I came to the conclusion that Myrtle was deeper than she seemed. Supposing Leslie hadn't been such a fool as I thought? I said something to Myrtle that gave her an idea of what was in my mind, something like, "Perhaps you're more in the old swine's confidence than I am and you know which way Dick's bread's buttered." She didn't utter a word or show she noticed it, and went on talking about other things. But the next Sunday she telephoned to me that you and she weren't going to see Uncle Fred and that perhaps I'd better go, it might please him. Something in the way she spoke made me do it. I found him sitting in that beastly little uncomfortable room and as grumpy and disagreeable as usual. After a ten minutes' silence, punctuated by unpleasant sounds, he began asking about how the boy was getting on at Clive, and I gave him the best answers I

could. By way of being pleasant he remarked "Let us hope he'll do better than his father."

I bit my tongue and he continued, "However I don't want to recriminate. I want you to know that I've recently remade my will and I have decided, after providing certain legacies, that the bulk of my fortune is to devolve upon Cyril—um—not all at once, mind you. He's to inherit it at different periods, beginning with a moderate amount when he's thirty, and further instalments every five years until his fiftieth year. Until then, the largest portion will be reserved." He spoke in that slow, measured precise way he adopted when he wanted to be impressive.

I don't know what he expected me to think of the precious scheme he'd imparted to me nor what he expected me to say. He sat there like a toad with his long ugly thin mouth pulled down at the corners, glowering at me over his eyeglasses. The only thought that came into my mind was not to give him the satisfaction of showing annoyance. I took care to keep my expression unchanged and simply remarked "That's very interesting."

He blew some smoke out of his thick, unpleasant nose and grunted "Yes, and if the trust should fail—the accumulations," he rolled the word on his tongue and repeated it, "the accumulations will fall into the residue and will go to a charity, the form of which I am considering."

Whether it's a good thing or not that one can't take the law into one's own hands I don't know, but my fingers itched to get to work at him. I was looking at the exact spot in his throat, just in the open space between the wings of his collar, where my thumbs would meet and press slowly and very carefully all the breath out of his cursed body. The imagined vision of his helpless writhing and his staring eyes gave me a certain satisfaction and relief. While I was thinking that, his eyes were still fixed on me and something in their expression tickled me and made me smile.

"There's nothing to laugh" he said angrily, "there's nothing to laugh."

He always left out the "at," it was one of those few peculiarities of speech that gave away his foreign origin.

"No indeed, nothing" I answered, "nothing at all. I was only wondering what Leslie would think about it."

"Leslie? What business is it of his? When I want his opinion, I'll ask him for it."

By a coincidence, a minute or two later Leslie did come into the room, looking rather plump and on good terms with himself. He often turned up at Mount Street just before lunch time to talk about the next week's racing with the old swine, and generally suck up to him. He never got anything out of it, but Leslie was

one of those people, and there are lots of them, to whom the smell of a rich man is a sort of tonic. They like feeling they're rubbing shoulders with money-bags though they can never get their hands into them. It's a sort of sweet pain.

I left them and went on to see you at Seymour Street where you'd taken a furnished house while you were looking for a permanent one, and found Myrtle practising some songs. I told her all about the interview and let myself go. To my mind it was the most infamous will I'd ever heard of, a thousand times worse than the governor's. Of course it was exactly the sort of will such an old devil would make. The point wasn't to benefit anybody but to keep his money together as long as possible, and do everything in his power to prevent anyone enjoying it. Myrtle didn't seem to be surprised, but her view was that old men are always making wills and changing them and she advised me not to take it too seriously. "Perhaps he told you just to see how you'd take it" she suggested. By the time you came in from a walk, we were having a good laugh over it. Myrtle was always ready to laugh over everything, and as I used to be very much that way myself, whatever we talked about ended in a joke. And she was perfectly right. I wonder how many different lies that old man told one or the other of us about his will in those next years.

What mattered much more to me then, was whether I could possibly get any ready cash out of him by foul means as I knew I couldn't by fair. I spent a lot of time thinking out all sorts of schemes but they none of them stood the test when I looked closely into them. At that time, it wouldn't have taken very much to put me on solid ground, I had done a good deal towards retrieving my position and was going slower. The chief reason for this was that the boy was growing up. You remember, after he failed for the Navy, we talked over what public school he ought to go to. You were against all English public schools and wanted me to send him to France and Germany. I wasn't in love with English public schools either. I should rather have let him have a tutor and do pretty much what he liked, but Nancy with her narrow-minded, conventional ideas was furious and said you wanted to be the boy's evil genius as you'd been mine. I told Myrtle this and here was an example of her unexpectedness. She entirely agreed with Nancy and told you you had no business to interfere and try experiments in education on other people's children. So he went to Clive after all because it was the best training school for the Army which his mother was determined he should go into. It didn't seem to me to matter much what he did as long as he was happy and got along without rows. I

had got awfully fond of him and I longed for him to have done with schools so that we could always be together. He had become more and more to me, especially after your marriage, and he was all I had to look forward to.

I wasn't any less fond of you but we were growing more and more apart. With the change in your life, you had become a different person, in a way I can't describe. You seemed to be living in a different world, one that I knew nothing about. I didn't know how you spent your time, you never seemed to me to go anywhere much or do anything. You never went to a club or a restaurant and very rarely to a theatre. The only thing I knew you did regularly was to attend the meetings of the Committee of the Kurt Home for Incurables of which The Rock had made you and Leslie members. I'm jolly glad he didn't consider me worthy of that honour. The sight of that old Pharisee presiding at a gathering of his fellow-humbugs would have been more than I could stand, apart from the mere boredom. Even Leslie admitted there was a good deal of time wasted in red tape but he appeared to think that he was getting some sort of *kudos* out of it. That wasn't your case. I asked Myrtle what on earth you did it for and she said you couldn't very well refuse as, ostensibly, you had nothing to do. I didn't ask her what you did unostensibly.

Meanwhile you had bought the lease of a house in Barrington Square and had it decorated in a peculiar manner of your own which you considered modern. At first I thought it awful beyond words but after a time I rather got to like it, especially when everyone else ran it down. When the crowd is against a thing, I always think there must be something in it. You'd taken up with an entirely new lot of people whom I'd never seen or heard of. I saw very little of them because when I came to lunch or dinner, it was to have a talk, nearly always I must say, about money, and naturally, you didn't have anyone. I only met people there when I dropped in now and then after dinner or for tea on Sundays on the rare occasions I was in town at week-ends. Then there was nearly always somebody there of a kind I'd never come up against, queer-looking coves who never seemed to dress in the evening and smoked pipes. I took rather a fancy to one or two of them, especially to Barry, that Irish painter who killed himself afterwards, poor devil.

Another thing typical of Myrtle was to back you up when you handed over the entire contents of Aquafonti to Elinor, no one but you two would have done such a ridiculous thing. You had been twenty years gathering that collection together and it must have been worth a small fortune ; I remember your friend Eugene

Hartmann telling me you had two pictures he could have sold for enough to come in jolly handy for me. It was part of your exaggerated way of behaving. Your explanation was that you had turned your back on the past and you wanted nothing that reminded you of it. I should have thought you could have done that cheaper, but from the moment that you gave thousands away, why not have given some of them to me? Myrtle never had an answer to that and I believe she thought you ought to have sold at least part of them for my benefit. But she would never have said so, everything you did was perfect to her. Another thing that was damned exaggerated was your never having an evening out. When a man spoils his wife like that he's a fool, because she appreciates him a great deal less than if he asserts his independence. No man ought to tie himself up in that way. Faithful husbands bore their wives, I've observed that all my life, and I told Myrtle so. Her answer was that you could be unfaithful to her whenever you liked, you were as free as I was. Of course I knew what that meant, so did you.

I can't understand what you two found to talk about from morning till night. Olivia said, every now and then she met you in the street or at a theatre, and you were always hard at it, talking, talking, as if you'd only just met. It used to be the same at Prince's where we all went

to skate in those days. There you were, you two, skating together, sitting together, talking, talking. And if she went away from you for ten minutes to have a lesson from the instructor, back she sailed into your arms the moment it was over and the interminable talking began again. I spoke to that charming niece of hers, Pansy Cane, about it ; our acquaintance started at Prince's. She didn't agree with me, she thought talking was the most amusing thing in life. I told her I did too, up to a point. She asked, " What point ? " and then skated away to Myrtle before I had a chance of answering.

It was very jolly at Prince's. I began liking Pansy immensely, she'd got something of Myrtle in her ; the same sort of humour, turning everything one said into a joke. I got her to come to tea at the Carlton once and I thought I was just getting on nice easy terms, but she slipped away from me. I never was able to get her on the telephone and when I went to call at Gloucester Place, I was received by her mother and Pansy was always out. I wasn't such a fool as not to know that was a put-up job between Myrtle and Irene to prevent my having an affair with Pansy. As a matter of fact Irene was quite as good company as her daughter and she was awfully understanding and sympathetic. I told her all sorts of things about my life ; she said she could listen for hours, it

was so interesting. She had that something about her that Myrtle had and is so difficult to explain, a way of making something out of nothing. One could start talking about skating or tarts or ping-pong, it didn't matter what, as long as it wasn't money, and before you knew where you were, an hour had passed. I suppose that's what happened with you and Myrtle.

I remember, at that time, Elinor had just remarried that chap Neil Carew who, as you know, was once rather a pal of mine. I told Irene about him and she asked no end of questions. He had ideas of his own about women. One of them was that only those are any good who have been broken in before you tackle them. He said they were the same as hunters; no one but a fool would ride a raw horse to hounds if he could afford a trained one. If ever he married, he'd marry a widow or a courtesan or a combination of the two. Irene said she hoped he hadn't been disappointed and we both had a good laugh.

XVIII

THE next spring you and Myrtle went to Switzerland, to Thun, I think, or to some equally depressing and bourgeois spot that you and she seemed, for some inexplicable reason, to prefer to more amusing places. I can't imagine what you did there but you stayed away the whole summer and sent me a postcard with a photograph of you both arm-in-arm against a background of horrible snow mountains, you with a beard on your chin. You looked as if you were still talking, she gazing up at you admiringly, you bending your head to catch the golden words that fell from her lips. But, though I may have laughed, I can't pretend I didn't rather envy you. You were so completely self-sufficient; Olivia called you "self-supporting." Leslie, always deeply impressed with what he called the cleverness of the Kurt family, used the words whenever he spoke of you and Myrtle, in another way. "Seen Richard and Myrtle lately?—supporting each other as usual, I suppose."

As I say, I envied you two, but not in every way. I didn't in the least want to live your sort of

existence but I couldn't help seeing that you had become an altogether different man. Compared with what you had always been, you were calm and peaceful and happier than you'd ever been in your life. You never seemed to want anything you hadn't got or to care whether other people approved or agreed with your way of living or not. You and she went your own way and yet you weren't at all indifferent about other people. On the contrary, nothing seemed to amuse Myrtle so much as to hear all the gossip I could tell her, and if ever I called at Barrington Square in the afternoon, she always had a sister or a niece or a nephew or a friend with her to whom she seemed to have nearly as much to say as to you. In some way of her own, Myrtle made herself a sort of centre of life and activity without apparently doing anything, for she was really indolent. Whenever I called you up in the morning, she answered the telephone. "Hulloa Myrtle, that you? In bed I suppose?"

"Yes. Aren't you?"

Of course I was in bed because I'd been up all night or most of it. Trixie never left the theatre till nearly midnight and I had to take her to supper and then home. But you and Myrtle hardly ever went out at night. That part of it wouldn't have suited me but most of the rest would, especially your and her utter unsnobbishness, your getting away from all the society paraphernalia.

Really, you lived with her as though she were your mistress more than your wife and that's the only way to live with a woman. I talked to Trixie about it and began considering whether I couldn't reorganise my own life in something like the same way. Though, outwardly, I was living under the same roof as Nancy when she was in London, actually, I was hardly ever with her. I put in an appearance at dinner, especially when there were people and sometimes went out with her, but as little as I could. Fortunately she wasn't keen on society and her friends were a quiet lot. I hardly knew who they were or their names, golf players mostly, and that harmless kind who have little sailing boats on the Solent and sham antique cottages with thatched roofs and rock-gardens in Kent and Sussex. Occasionally she went to the theatre or a concert with a woman friend or a married couple, but nearly every evening she had people in for bridge, which let me off. This state of things hadn't come all at once, I'd broken her in to it gradually. Her attitude had become tolerant. What she thought I did, I didn't know, I had a lot of men friends and it was quite easy to have some plausible engagement whenever she asked me what I was doing. All the same, after you married Myrtle, I began to feel the tie more than I had before, I hated the pretence of it and, as the boy grew

older, I got more and more tired of night-life and restaurants. Trixie wasn't at all the knock-about kind and, latterly, we had come to going back to the flat I'd taken and furnished for her at Dante Gardens, to have supper after she left the theatre, instead of Romano's or the Savoy. My life with her became more and more the real one of the two. It wasn't exciting but it was easy; I didn't have to pretend anything, even that I was faithful. Trixie was much too sensible to object to my occasional little fancies, she knew they weren't serious and wouldn't last.

I took Nancy and the children to Dinard that summer. She never liked Deauville which she always considered a sink of iniquity, and now that Cyril was growing into a lad, she was dead up against it. I utterly disagreed with her point of view about the boy, my own being that the more youngsters see, the better, and that there's no greater mistake than hiding things they've got to find out sooner or later. My chief wish was to bring him up as differently as I possibly could from the way I'd been brought up myself, to have no cant and humbug, and not to pretend I was different to what I was. But there was plenty of time and it wasn't worth getting across Nancy over Deauville, especially as I could and did run over there myself for the racing week. Besides, Dinard was

a better place for Cyril, he could run wild and swim, play tennis, golf and sail all day long; he loved his summer holiday there. He was growing into a splendid youngster, there was hardly a trace of the Kurts in him. Instead of those dark, beady eyes, he had large blue ones, bluest of blue, with long dark lashes and a nose that tilted up instead of down. I don't know if he was what is called handsome but I thought him so. He was tall for his age and well formed and was naturally good at every game. I was keen he should be, I didn't want him to be a slacker like myself, but he didn't need driving. He was only fourteen then and he could take on any boy of his age at whatever was going, and lick him. He wasn't a bit swanky about it either. Of course his mother and Edie doted on him, but it was me he wanted. Thank God, then and always I came first with him as he came first with me.

At that time I'd almost given up the Stock Exchange. I hadn't left my firm and had an arrangement by which I was credited with a share in certain business, but it was no use to me going to the beastly place if I couldn't deal on my own and Michaelis wouldn't stand for that, after my big bust-up. The debt to the bank was still hanging over my head, but otherwise I wasn't in a very bad way. My income was enough to keep things going and if I could

sit tight for a time, I still had hopes I could tap The Rock somehow or other. I certainly was an optimist for there was precious little encouragement for me to think so.

From every side I heard of his growing wealth and the enormous scale of his deals. He was in syndicates with all the big bugs and had interests in every part of the world. You came back from Switzerland about the same time as we did from Dinard and one of the first things I told you was that he would soon be getting a knighthood or a baronetcy. You laughed at me, but a few weeks later he got his K.C.V.O. After that he got more unbearable than ever. What I couldn't stand was his mock modesty and his pretence that it meant nothing to him when I knew that lick-spittling skunk, Colonel Mayhew, who was his general bottle-washer, social adviser and stud-manager, had been touting about for him for months. His puffed-up self-importance was unendurable and what made it harder to bear was that everybody seemed to take the old beast at his own valuation. Every now and then I met some quite decent sensible man like Dr. Chaplin or Harcourt Manning the old fellow who's the boss of my lodge, and they talked about "your uncle, Sir Frederick," with deep respect. When I told them he was a mean old screw, I saw they were painfully shocked, so I piled it on and informed them that he was a

vicious voluptuary who seduced innocent young girls and tried to take liberties with every woman he could get near to. I knew they'd think that the limit and that they'd be sure to repeat it at their clubs, so I let them have it.

With all his money he never enjoyed himself. He didn't know one of his horses from another and whenever he went racing, he was only thinking about his book. He never knew how to spend money, even to be comfortable. He had that huge flat and lived in one room of it ; the place never looked lived in. He bought old pictures and antique snuff-boxes and miniatures, but as his one idea was to pick up bargains and to buy cheap, most of them were stumers. Do you remember the enormous number of modern mezzotints a dealer succeeded in unloading on him by assuring him they would be worth three times as much as he gave for them in a few years ? He never looked at them ; when they arrived, he told his servant to open the package and put the contents on the top of the others in the last folio ; there they stayed. That was as much as he cared about art. It was of the same class as his humour.

So things went on and another year passed. In the course of it I had gradually drifted more and more away from Nancy and was living almost completely separated from her. I think she was the happier for it ; I know I was.

I didn't see you often, and hardly ever alone, though whenever I asked you to come to see me about anything, you always did. But you and I never got back to the old intimacy; there didn't seem to be anything left in common. During that time, I met Stanford at your house. He was a gentle creature and I thought, through him, I could get to know something about pictures. He took me to the National Gallery and the British Museum but a little of that went a long way with me. I asked him to dinner at the Café Royal which he appeared to like quite as much as art. He got rather drunk and made up to Trixie in a maudlin sentimental way which amused us both. He started painting her portrait and we saw a good deal of him. He told me you had dropped him and taken up with what he called 'Futurists'; he was rather shirty about your having chucked him and given his pictures away because they weren't up-to-date enough. I asked Myrtle about it. She said she couldn't stand the way he fidgeted with his moustache and his affected way of talking; she knew nothing about pictures but he bored her to death.

I always took the boy to see you in his holidays. You'd begun getting very fond of him. No wonder! How could you resist that laughing glance of his. Trixie adored him. You disapproved of my having him at Dante Gardens;

I thought it Puritan piffle. Why shouldn't he know the situation as it was? In your view, it was wrong for me to encourage him to deceive his mother, he couldn't possibly tell her he'd been to see my mistress. My answer to that was that he'd have to deceive her, anyhow, sooner or later. Nancy was one of those good women who refuse to admit the evidence of their own senses. She would have brought him up to have nothing to do with women, a nice thing for a young man. We know what that leads to. Anyhow I let him come, I never had any reason to regret it and, if I hadn't, there would have been so many hours less I should have spent with him.

That summer we went to Dinard again where Myrtle's brother-in-law turned up with his twin sons. I liked the boys, but Nancy was against them because of what she called, their foreign manners, and tried to keep Cyril away from them. That simply meant that their father, like a sensible man, let them go to the Casino and dance with any girls they picked up. They were devoted to Myrtle and you and, because of that, they were ready to take Cyril to their hearts, Nancy notwithstanding. They were a year older than Cyril, but it would have surprised Nancy if she had heard them telling me how much more Cyril knew about life than they did. It amused me to see him playing the man

of the world with them and telling them which were the girls to know and which to avoid. So far from the boy's training with Trixie and me having done him any harm, it had simply opened his eyes and prevented him being caught in the traps we fell into at his age, because we had a schoolmaster for a father instead of a friend. I didn't even go to Deauville for the racing, I got more fun out of being with Cyril and taking part in what he did. He laughed at me for being soft, and in spite of my resistance, made me play golf and swim, with the result that I got fitter than I'd been for years. Day by day, he grew more into my heart and I began, for the first time in my life, to have a notion that happiness might be something quite different to what I supposed. It wasn't that I had any ambition on my own account, any desire to change myself. I was what I was for good or for evil. But I came to see that I had never before really cared about anyone or anything and that what I had called pleasure was only building up a barricade against mortal boredom. I wrote something of that kind to Myrtle who, I knew, would like to hear about her nephews. Their mother had died the winter before you and she married and you had told me that the two sisters adored each other. She wrote me a long letter back, so sympathetic that I kept it and read it over again several times, a very rare

thing for me to do. I think that was the first letter I'd ever written her and it was curious I thought of it. No one else would have taken it as she did and understood so well what I meant. A good woman couldn't have resisted moralising or preaching but Myrtle wasn't good and didn't pretend to be. She saw things as they were and very much as I did. Her advice to me was to see as much of the boy as I could and not to let anyone in the world come between him and me. I took damned good care of that.

You had taken a house on the Wye for the summer. Eugene Hartmann was staying with you and you wrote me that he was very pessimistic about the European situation. He was one of the few old friends of your Elinor days you'd stuck to. I knew he was a diplomat and well informed, but I wasn't in the mood to bother about politics and I hardly looked at the papers. The morning in bed was my usual time for reading them and the boy had abolished that by making me go for a swim early and come back to a huge breakfast out of doors. My ignorance didn't last long. A week later, war was declared and I knew Frenchmen well enough to get home sharp.

In the midst of the excitement one thought was uppermost in my mind. How would this affect The Rock? No one knew, I least of all, what the position in the City would be, what

steps, if any, would be taken to prevent panic. But I knew his enormous commitments and I remembered the governor's words "Your uncle will never sell." I thought it more than likely that we in the family would all go down. I didn't know but what the governor's estate was still in the hands of the firm and I was perfectly sure that, if The Rock was hard put to it, he wouldn't hesitate to use the gilt-edged stuff he'd made such a virtue of putting in the trust, to raise cash on against his own liabilities. With this in my mind and though I'd pretty well realised what such a smash would mean to all of us, including the boy, I hoped with my whole soul that this time The Rock was done. Nothing on earth would have given me such satisfaction as to know that at long last he had gone to everlasting smash. The moment we landed from the steamer, I devoured the papers but I was unable to make sure what effect the suspending of speculation and settlements would have upon a man in his position.

We got to London about 9 o'clock. By ten I was in W. K. & Co.'s office. I stood a moment at the swing-door. Everything was as usual. The clerks were bending over their books, the telephone rang and was being answered as always by the goggle-eyed youth. No one appeared to be in the least disturbed. I asked the old sergeant at the door whether Sir Fred-

erick had arrived. "He's never here before ten-thirty, sir." He'd got on all his war medals but he went on with his letter-sorting as though nothing had happened. It was baffling, absolutely baffling.

I walked into the office. There were Bellows and Kahn at their accustomed tables, covered as always with neat bundles of stock and surrounded by tin boxes marked W. K. & Co., full of the same. They didn't even look up as I passed them. It was only when I said good morning, that Kahn rapped out cheerfully "Morning. Just got back, eh?" and continued writing his little figures in the red morocco book he never parted from. Neither he nor Bellows showed the slightest sign of being worried or upset, they were neither more nor less busy than I had always seen them. What was the meaning of it all? We were at war with Germany and Austria; at that very moment the French were across the frontier in Alsace, the Germans were advancing against Liège, two of our torpedo boats had been blown up by mines, all over the country recruits were rushing to join the colours and half the expeditionary force was being embarked. Everywhere, men were in motion. And here was this damned office carrying on as usual, no one apparently caring a curse about it all.

I went into the partners' room and looked

through the window. There were two or three little knots of men in the street, mostly young clerks, but they kept breaking up and disappearing into offices or the Stock Exchange. I was wild to go down and hear all the news there was, but I had to wait and control my impatience as well as I could. I didn't want to miss the first sight of The Rock when he came in, I wanted to gloat over him. They could put this bold face on it in the office, perhaps it was a tradition. it couldn't have been done for my benefit, but the game was up. It wasn't possible that such a thing as this could happen, practically from one day to the other, without the strongest firm in London trembling, let alone one whose chief business was gambling. I walked about the room smoking cigarettes. The great double writing-table was bare of everything except its furniture, blotting pads, silver inkpots, trays for the pens and the governor's photograph in a Homburg hat with a cigar in his mouth. He seemed to be smiling in a rather sardonic way at me and I turned away from it, feeling irritated, and looked out of the window again. As I did so, I heard the door open, and turned.

The Rock came slowly into the room, threw the "Times" on the top of the blotter, hung up his top-hat, put his umbrella in the corner, and sat down in his chair and touched the electric bell. He looked exactly as he always did, he

hadn't even glanced in my direction when the correspondence clerk brought in the letters and telegrams and stood beside him as he or another had brought the letters and telegrams and stood beside him or the governor for forty years.

"Not many telegrams, Parsons, eh?" He actually uttered a little laugh.

"There's a good deal of delay, Sir Frederick. But Graves managed to get through to Paris on the 'phone. Our friends have deposited all the bearer securities in the Bank of France. Their people here delivered the rest of the securities after you left yesterday and we managed to get them into the House strong room. Mr. Bellows took them to the Bank as soon as they opened this morning."

"That's all right, Parsons. Anyone else called up?"

"There's only Dickson and Smith to go, at present, Sir Frederick. Dickson's got till next week. Smith's got to report to-morrow."

"Send him in. That'll do, Parsons."

The chap went out and in a minute a lanky red-haired fellow with a bristling moustache came and stood by the table in a military attitude. The Rock looked at him without saying anything for a minute, then he cleared his throat and looked over at me.

"Please go out a minute" he said.

I went and stood beside Kahn's table and

asked him what Smith's job was and what he was in.

"Porter. Sergeant Second Life Guards reserve" Kahn said and went on with his figures.

I knew Dickson. He was one of the authorised clerks. "What's he in?" I asked.

"Militia. Can't talk now. Busy."

In a couple of minutes the Life Guardsman came out looking pleased with himself and the world in general, and told me Sir Frederick was expecting me.

The Rock was reading the "Times" but he put it down and asked me when we'd come back. I told him, that morning.

"Very wise. You might have had difficulty if you'd waited. How are Nancy and the children?"

I told him they were all right. I was itching to get something or other out of him. "So it's come at last" was all I could think of.

"Yes, it's come." He put his thumb on one side of his nose and his first finger on the other and rubbed his clean-shaven upper lip, put his eyeglasses on his nose and took up the "Times."

"It had to come sooner or later" I remarked.

"No, it didn't." Flat contradiction was always one of his favourite forms of argument.

"Anyhow, I always said it would. When there's a megalomaniac on the throne like the Kaiser——"

He turned the paper over and without looking up, threw at me, "You know nothing about it. You only repeat the rubbish that you read in the yellow press."

"Even such a fool as I was right this time."

"Yes. That's quite true. You and the other fools were right, war has come. Unfortunately it won't be only the fools who'll pay for it."

That was all I got, but I kept my temper and went down to the Stock Exchange. The first person I saw in the street was Leslie, buzzing about in and out of offices. He caught hold of my arm. "I've just seen Stein. He says the old man's all right, I don't know how he knows; he says it may cost him a million or two but he can stand it."

XIX

YOU stayed in the country till the end of September partly because old Mr. Vendramin had recently died and you had Myrtle's mother staying with you. I had got my commission. You were just as much carried off your feet as anyone at first. You joined the League of Frontiersmen while you were away and though you didn't tell me, I heard you'd been to the O.C. of your old Yeomanry and that he'd turned you down because you were over age. At that time the war had put fresh life into me. I thoroughly enjoyed the excitement, the feeling that everything was more or less endways and that all the solemn old bores and kill-joys like The Rock were down and out.

I went to see him as soon as my uniform was made, hoping the sight of it would rile him, and that he'd make some sneering remark. To my surprise he expressed his approval of my having joined and said that I was admirably fitted to be a soldier. I dare say there was sarcasm behind it but I didn't care. What he thought didn't matter any more than a baby's hiccough. He said little or nothing to anybody,

just went to the City every day and from there to the Bentinck to play bridge as he always did. Those were the early days when everyone was repeating that story about thousands of Russians passing through England in trains with the blinds drawn, on their way to surprise the Germans. I had been told the story circumstantially so many times that I fully believed it and when Leslie told me that The Rock was beginning to make himself unpopular at the Club by throwing cold water on the whole thing, it seemed to me typical of his obstinate disbelief in everybody.

Another item of news from Leslie about him was when Sir Edward Field, the K.C. who defended all the big criminals and was supposed to know as much as anyone at the Bentinck about what was going to happen, said that the war couldn't last more than six months because the Germans wouldn't be able to find the money. The Rock took him up in front of the whole room by remarking that lack of money had never stopped a war yet and never would, and that evidently Sir Edward Field knew very little about the might of the German Empire. That didn't increase his popularity.

Meanwhile, I went down to Thanet to train with the battalion and you took on a job with a Government Departmental Committee. I had a rattling good time soldiering with the

youngsters. Montie Russell was a devilish genial C.O. and, as he and I were old pals, he made it easy for me and gave me a captaincy almost at once. We had some rare rags at the different seaside places. I was always on the side of the boys, whatever happened, and when they got into rows, I managed to put matters right. We were all wild to go out but as we were the twelfth battalion and mostly raw, our turn was a long way off. But, happy-go-lucky as we were, we couldn't help seeing that things weren't going any too well at the front. The lists of killed and wounded got longer and longer and drafts from the other battalions kept being called for.

I arranged for Nancy and the children to stay at Eastbourne for Christmas ; camp was within motoring distance and I should be able to spend most week-ends and any odd times with the boy. I thanked my stars he was only just fifteen and well out of it. At the worst, the war couldn't last long enough to mop him up. He was doing capitally at Clive, well up in the school and in the second Rugger fifteen. But cricket was his game and he was looking forward to the summer term when he meant to have a good go at getting his colours. He was awfully proud of my having joined up and loved calling me Captain Kurt to everybody. Like nearly all the other boys, he was in his school O.T.C. and fearfully envious of the older ones who had a

good chance of seeing service. He kept up a desultory correspondence with Myrtle's twin nephews who were at Charterhouse. He asked me several times if I thought they would get out. Each time I said "not the slightest chance" and thought so, but I saw he didn't agree with me and one day this was explained by a letter he showed me from Francis, the one he generally wrote to. In it the lad said something about Uncle Richard's believing the war would last several years. I told Cyril it was rot and that you always had a mania for being of a different opinion to everybody else. But somehow or other the idea stuck in my head and worried me vaguely, especially when I went to bed. So much so that I made up my mind to have a talk with you, and when the boy went back to Clive I got leave and stopped in town for the week-end, partly to see you and partly to have a look at The Rock. It wasn't a very enlivening experience. A fearful number of wounded were coming back, every other house was a hospital and every other car had a red cross on it. The Clubs were upside down, one was rottenly served in the restaurants where all the good waiters had been called up; the Park was full of recruits being drilled and everybody not in khaki was rushing about with attaché cases as though they hadn't a minute to spare. To put the lid on, Trixie was training to be a Red Cross nurse.

I must say it was a relief to go to Barrington Square and find you and Myrtle the same as usual except that you were busy with a lot of documents connected with your Committee business. After a decent dinner and a bottle of pop, we had a yarn. You were quite settled in your mind that the war was going to be a long affair, it still seemed to me chiefly because no one else thought so, and it's no use going into your reasons. The next morning we all three went to see The Rock; Myrtle's presence made him comparatively decent. She had advised me to avoid contentious subjects, but I couldn't resist asking him what he thought about the length of the war.

"It will last until Germany is beaten, if it takes one year or ten."

Leslie came in just before he said those words, and asked "Then you do think we shall beat Germany?"

His tone suggested that Uncle Fred believed the contrary, and I observed, with joy, the withering expression of contempt the old devil bestowed on him as he asked Myrtle how her mother was. While Myrtle answered I got behind Leslie and whispered in his ear "Ask him again." That bucked him up and the silly ass repeated his question but in a different way.

"I thought you believed Germany was going to beat us?"

The Rock finished what he was saying to Myrtle and turned to Leslie. His lips closed tight and he looked at him a second, then he answered "You thought. You're not capable of thinking and it's such as you who distort and misrepresent the few who are."

Nothing amused me more than when The Rock snubbed Leslie, who spent most of his time sucking up to him. He really believed the old man enjoyed his society and thought a good deal of him, in spite of my repeating back every offensive remark Uncle Fred made about him, and he made a good many. Leslie never knew what to believe and what not to believe, because when it suited me, I told him what I'd said before had only been to get a rise out of him. Rotting and humbugging Leslie had been one of my forms of relaxation for years, and sometimes he was useful to me. When, for instance, I wanted information, I set him to work by telling him how cute he was at that sort of thing. That flattered him. Or if I wanted something passed on, all I had to do was to tell it to him and impress on him not to repeat it. The best of it was, whenever he gave it away, he always prefaced his statement by "Don't tell anyone" or "Don't say I said so but" or "In strict confidence——" or "Between you and me, Tony said so and so" which was just what I wanted him to do.

The winter wore slowly through and I began to get very weary of camp life : it had begun to tell on me. I stuck it out until after Easter because of the boy. I didn't like having to admit to him, when he came home for the holidays, that I could not stand for it. After he went back, there was a brigade field-day and a drastic inspection. The next thing we knew was that Montie Russell had been booted out. The new O.C. was a very different type, a fierce old dug-out who kept us going from early morn till dewy eve and bullied the lives out of us. That soon finished me. I went sick and a few weeks later I was back at Dante Gardens.

Thanks to my old pal Sinclair, I got a billet under the Provost-Marshal that exactly suited me, going round to restaurants and night places to round up any of the boys who were asking for trouble.

Your Committee job had come to an end and you'd taken a house in the country near Berkhamstead where the twins were training in the O.T.C. They were only just seventeen. I saw you now and then ; you were more certain than ever that it was going to be a long war. By that time people generally were beginning to say the same. Still a year was a long time if it came to that, and I couldn't and wouldn't believe it would last long enough for the twins to have to go out. At that time they weren't send-

ing them until they'd been with the colours at least six months and then sparingly. But the casualties kept increasing, more and more of one's friends' sons were among them. Myrtle had a large number of relations in the Army and several had been killed or wounded. Her brother's elder son was at the front, the younger one would soon be going. Our cousin Jack had got his commission in the Scots Guards. The war was getting nearer.

The boy got his cricket colours that summer and he was the youngest in the eleven. You and I went down to see him play against Charterhouse and the twins got leave and came too. What a bonny lad he was as he came racing across the field to us in his flannels with his shirt open at the neck and his striped scarf round his waist, flushed with excitement. His side had lost the toss and they were in the field. The twins cheered when Cyril missed a hard catch at long on but little Walter whispered to me "I'd much rather he hadn't muffed it all the same." He and Cyril were friends but he had to cheer his own school.

All out for a hundred and forty-three, and Clive went in to bat. The boy threw himself down on the grass by us in his pads, but not a word; his eyes were fixed on the game.

"Carruthers clean bowled for three! I say!" Cyril shot a glance at me and repeated "I say!"

He couldn't understand it. "Never mind. Phelps will stand up to them. Bravo Phelps!" and he clapped as a little stuffy square chap took up his stance.

"Hull-Low! Hull-Low!" The boy jumped to his feet. "Two wickets for seventeen, I've got to go in."

He goes slowly across the clean, smooth turf, with his hat under his arm, pulling on his gloves. He touches his cap as the cheers reach him, takes his middle from the umpire, has a good look round at the fielders.

"There's a drive for you, Dick!"

The first ball was a bit loose and gave him his chance. A beautiful long low hit. He didn't have a long innings, but before he was run out, he knocked up a goodish lot of runs and broke the Charterhouse batting. The moment he was out, he came tearing back to us with the sweat streaming down his face. But his eyes were all for the game; it wasn't until Clive had a comfortable margin of runs to spare that he had any thought for us. The hero of the day was Phelps, who carried out his bat to the joy of Cyril. No wonder the boy was popular.

By the early winter the twins were gazetted to their regiments. Both were in the R.F.A. but in different batteries. Walter was in the North of England somewhere and Francis on Sablisury Plain. You had taken on some sort

of hospital work. I didn't see much of you and, when I did, you depressed me by your pessimism. According to you, the war would go on until there was no one left to fight. Your chief occupation seemed to be inventing schemes to delay Myrtle's nephews going to the front and you succeeded in persuading Francis to throw up his temporary commission and go to Woolwich. This meant at least six months longer before he would go out, possibly a year. You did your best with Walter but nothing would induce him to sweat for an exam, besides which he was more French than English in temperament. He'd spent his boyhood in Paris and would have gone into the French Army as a private if you and Myrtle hadn't prevented him. As it was, he longed to get to France.

Whenever the twins could get leave, they came up to town for a beano which Walter was nuts on. That boy was a born *fêteur*; naturally, he took to me and let me know when he'd be up. On one of those occasions I had you all to *Ciro's*, of which I was one of the first members. Dobson who started it was an old night-life chum of mine and gave me special privileges as all that sort did, and my being under the Provost-Marshal gave me others which I took good care to avail myself of. Walter got rather drunk and gave you away, "Uncle Richard wants me to go to Sandhurst. That's *camouflage*, I know all about

that. I'm not taking any, I want to get to France."

I remember you were awfully down on the young war-widows for dancing; I couldn't see it, nor could Myrtle. If they wanted to dance, why shouldn't they? Would they have done themselves or anyone any good by pretending to care when they didn't. Besides, one had to do something to keep the youngsters going and oneself too. We had enough of the war all day without talking about nothing else all night. Jazz hadn't begun then or I should have been at it as hard as the best of them. You shut up when Myrtle agreed with me but when we left and a stream of ambulances, scores of them, came slowly past us as we stood on the pavement near Charing Cross, waiting for taxis to take us home at about three in the morning, you said that was what put you off dancing. I thought that just as rotten an argument as any other. What good would it have done those poor devils for us to be thinking about them and pulling long faces? If I'd been in one of those ambulances and well enough to look out and see some pretty girls in *décolleté* frocks and wraps, and cheery chaps in mess uniform or evening dress, coming home from a dance, I should have felt all the better for it. It all depends upon the way you look at things.

The next summer you took a farm-house on

Exmoor and had all the boys there and some girls, amongst them Edie. You got horses for them and gave them a good time. Quite right too. But what difference, pray, was there between your hunting and others dancing? Why is it righteous to hunt or shoot or play golf, and wicked to have a good dinner and a bottle of pop and dance or do any other old thing after it that warms your blood and makes life worth living?

By the beginning of the next winter both Myrtle's nephews were at the front. Francis ran through Woolwich in less than six months, he wasn't by way of taking your tip to linger, and his brother only got out a head in front of him. You tried the same game on Cyril while he was with you on Exmoor, only the other way round. You did your utmost to get him to stay another term at Clive and you used all sorts of arguments. When you saw that was no good, you tried to persuade him to chuck Sandhurst and take a temporary commission. He told me all about it the moment he saw me. I don't know how you could have imagined that sort of boy would ever have listened to you. He'd had his name down for the Rifle Brigade ever since he'd been at Clive and his only fear was there wouldn't be a vacancy in the regular battalions. When you spoke to me about it afterwards, I told you you might as well have argued with a

stone wall. He knew what you were after, of course, and it didn't matter because you were his Uncle, but if I had tried, he would only have thought me a rotter.

What you didn't know was, that when your general attitude about the war began changing, which it did, that year, nothing you could say would have influenced any of us. I didn't want to argue with you because it would have come to a row, so I said nothing, but I could see plainly enough that you were at your old game. As long as people were fairly quiet and not worked up against the Huns, you found fault with everybody, the Government, the papers, the War Office, for not taking the war seriously enough ; but no sooner had the country begun to realise what we were in for, than you rounded. Nothing was bad enough for you to say about Northcliffe, about Lloyd George, about Lovat Fraser, about just those people who did more than anyone else to rouse hate against the devilish savages we were at war with. And what riled me more than anything was that you were standing in with that old swine The Rock, who was a notorious pro-German. Everybody made remarks about it. If it had been only what Leslie said, I might have ignored it but I heard the same thing right and left, and what I chiefly minded was the effect it might have upon Cyril's career in the Army. And when I

spoke to you seriously about that, you jeered at me. You denied Uncle Fred was pro-German, people were fools who said he was, and anyhow, nothing he said or did could affect the boy one way or the other. I appealed to Myrtle and she wanted to know what you could do about it even if you agreed with me. I told her you had the ear of the old man and you could tell him to shut his mouth. Myrtle said the difficulty was to make him open it and as usual the discussion ended in our both laughing.

All the same I was sick with you and I got sicker still when there was that row at the Bentinck. He still went there every afternoon to play bridge and it says a great deal for the members that they stood him so long. But when it came to his defending the torpedoing of the Lusitania, it was a bit too much and he had to resign. You said he didn't defend the sinking of the ship. As you weren't there, I don't see how you could know anything about it. What he said was "They were warned." If that wasn't defending it, I don't know what was. After he had to leave the Bentinck, he took to going to the Cobden again for a time. He was one of the original members there and had subscribed to keep the Club going when it was in low water, so they had to stand him for a time, but it didn't last long. I took care of that.

I put Leslie on to the line, and by the time he'd repeated the Lusitania story to everybody he knew, they were on the look-out for him.

That winter, air-raiding began proper and when you and Myrtle offed it to the cottage at Rickmansworth, I asked you if you and dear old Uncle Fred defended that. That rose you a bit and you told me to go and ask him. I made up my mind to wait for the next good bombing night but meanwhile poor Jack got killed and it put it out of my head. Nancy had always kept in with the Theo family and had been especially thick with them since the war, so the boy had got fond of Jack and was awfully cut up. At the same time The Rock had one of his periodical attacks which sent him to bed. Each time they came, I expected they would finish him but they never did. He must have had a constitution of iron to have stood them. Twenty-four hours in bed, another twenty-four in his chair, and he was out again and at the City, looking as hard and strong as ever. He took Jack's death as he did everything else, without saying a word. You thought it hit him. I didn't, I didn't believe he ever felt anything except spite and hate.

He still went to dine at Olivia's, but less often. I think this was partly because some of Leslie's gossip had reached his ears. The Rock had his

knife well into him one evening when I was of the party and I had a notion that a row wasn't far off. A short time afterwards it came. Olivia telephoned to me: she was dreadfully upset about it. The old man had been dining there the previous night. It so happened that Leslie had heard that afternoon that the Committee of the Cobden had posted a notice that members having any German or Austrian relatives or connections were requested not to frequent the Club, and that The Rock, regarding this as a personal insult, had sent in his resignation. Of course Leslie was full of it. As the war went on, he became more and more bloodthirsty against spies in high places, whom he suspected everywhere. Uncle Fred hadn't shown in any way that he was in the least upset about the Club. On the contrary he had been rather amiable and had eaten a particularly good dinner. Riled by his equanimity, Leslie had made some unpleasant remarks with hints in them that he'd heard about the old man's Lusitania *gaffe*, and that he knew all about his having resigned at the Cobden. The Rock steadily refused to be drawn and went on eating his dinner without answering. Leslie, stupid as always, thinking the day had come when such an old pro-German would take anything lying down, let off something so blatantly offensive that The Rock got up from the table, kissed

Olivia good night and walked out of the house, without another word.

I knew that meant the end of what, for want of a better name, one could call friendship between those two, a friendship which implied a sort of contemptuous tolerance on the one side and a feeble, partly envious, partly admiring sycophancy on the other. If it hadn't been for the war, even my constantly making the wretched Leslie a cushion for Uncle Fred's pins and making use of him as a sounding-board for unpleasant intelligence, wouldn't have ruptured an association that was one of Leslie's chief objects in life. But even his submissiveness couldn't stand the old brute, who had made millions out of England and who had spent nearly his whole life here, whose grand-nephews were fighting for her, standing up for the enemy who had brought all this misery upon us. And this was the man you defended. What did you say when I told you about the row? That it served Leslie right for being such a coward as to insult an old man who had the courage to be true to himself at a time when to be so meant persecution even at the hands of his own people. Courage, true to himself, rot. All he thought about were his money-bags. I needn't have been surprised. While everyone was doing his bit, even I in my way, you and Myrtle went off to your cottage bomb-dodging and, as you said yourselves,

keeping as much away from the war as you possibly could. That was your business but when it came to saying that pro-Germans were right and everybody else wrong, it got a bit too thick.

The boy hadn't been at Sandhurst three months before he was made under-officer and, of course, he was proud of his promotion. But it came to me as a shock; the more they thought of him, the sooner they would push him out. It would soon be spring, the time of the year I used to look forward to, ages ago, for the racing and jolly little trips to Paris when the *bois* was getting green and the lilacs were out. Such racing as there was now, was dead. I'd given it up altogether and I didn't even think of accepting an offer from Langdale to go over to Paris and take a billet under him in the Passport Office. My one haunting concern was for the boy. If only the cursed war would end now or within the next three or four months. I asked nothing more than that of God or Providence or Fate, whichever it was. I took futile oaths when I went to bed about the virtuous life I'd lead if only the boy didn't have to go into that hell. It had got to the point when every youngster went out with the certainty of being hit once if he was in the infantry. They talked as a matter of course about where they'd like to go when they were convalescing from

wounds. I saw a lot of Cyril's friends and I was hard put to it to keep smiling, when they talked about their pals out there, boys who had only been out of Sandhurst a few months. What luck this one had to get back in time to finish up the hunting season minus an arm, and that one's artificial leg wouldn't prevent his playing cricket. It was just the matter-of-courseness that sickened and I thought of your attempts to persuade the boy to chuck Sandhurst and take on a temporary commission. We could have easily wangled him into the Army Service Corps or something safe. The talk about one's own boy being with the best left me cold. I'd have saved him at any price, I'd have given my own rotten carcass ten times over if that could have got him out of it. Too late. He had to go through with it and so had I.

I went sick again and chucked my job. I couldn't stand the restaurants. I couldn't stand seeing the boys home on short leave giving send-off parties, I couldn't stand their sham laughter, their sham gaiety, their sham courage. I damned well knew what they felt, those who'd been out. I made Trixie chuck her nursing and come back to me. I couldn't stand being alone, and there were plenty of nurses without her, paid ones who knew their job. The day Cyril was gazetted to his battalion, you got the telegram about poor little Walter. You came up that evening.

There was nothing to be said. There it was. The other twin was left—so far. He was in the thick of it. I knew what was in Myrtle's mind. I knew what it was to feel—at last.

One of Trixie's theatre pals was living with a man called Melrose. He was one of those chaps who aren't particular and take on any sort of job that will put the stuff in their pockets. Trixie said he had a pull with a big pot in the War Office and he could make Cyril safe if anyone could. I asked the fellow to lunch and he said he'd have a try but it was a ticklish job, he wanted a thousand on account. I'd have pawned my everlasting soul, but my overdraft was still unpaid and the usurers had all got cold feet and weren't taking on new business. I thought of The Rock. I hadn't been near him for weeks, the thought of going to see him when I was in that state was unbearable. But this was a scheme that might appeal to him. I didn't for a moment think he'd do it out of any sympathy for me or for love of the boy. But he was looking to him to save his stake. If Cyril went down, there was no one for him to leave his money to and though he might have lost half his fortune, there must be a decent bit left, besides the chance of his making his loss good when the war was over.

I went to see him and it happened to be the

night of the worst air-raid we'd had. Just as I got to Mount Street there was a hell of a din of anti-aircraft guns, a couple of bombs fell round the corner in Davies Street and another a street or two further away. Everyone bolted for cover, mostly into the Coburg Hotel where a crowd was fighting to get in. My old taxi-man, who looked about seventy, didn't seem to mind, but he said the job was worth a Bradbury and I gave it him. I had to ring several times at the entrance of the flat building before the terrified wife of the porter who had been called up, opened the door, and she skedaddled down to the basement the moment she'd let me in. I rang the bell of the flat but no one answered. There was no light in the hall; that enforced restriction must chime in well, I thought, with The Rock's natural parsimony. Meanwhile the guns were booming and every minute there was an explosion which shook the whole building. After several rings there was a faint light and I could see the figure of the old man through the glass door as he came slowly to open it. We went into the little room. He'd had a gas-fire put in; there was a small table in front of it covered with cards, and he sat down and went on playing his game of patience.

"At their bloody game again, the swine." I knew it wasn't a conciliatory opening but the sight of him, sitting there quietly playing

patience while those cursed Huns were hurling their infernal bombs on women and children, maddened me.

"War is a bloody game, you're quite right."

"It doesn't have to be carried on like this though."

"Why doesn't it? Don't you know the proverb 'All's fair in love and war'?"

"That doesn't mean that it's fair to make war on women and children."

He didn't answer for a minute, apparently he was more interested in his game. It didn't come out and he shuffled up the cards. "No good, no good." He turned round, took off his glasses and rubbed his nose. His lips were shut tight, his face was as cleanly shaved, his dress as neat as always. He looked well and quite rosy under the light of the reading lamp, the only one lit. All of a sudden it struck me that at all events the old man wasn't a funk.

"You don't seem to mind the raids."

"Why should I?"

"Everyone else does, nearly."

"Let them, it's their business."

He lit a cigarette and scratched his head, upon which there was still quite a good growth of curly grisly hair, and yawned. I wasn't getting on with my story and didn't know how to begin. Perhaps he wouldn't see it as I had expected. Perhaps, after all, I didn't understand this old

curmudgeon as well as I thought. But I must have a try.

"Uncle Fred, the boy's time will soon be up. I'd give anything to get him out of it."

He folded his lips up, blew smoke out of his nose and said, without looking up, "I understand that, but it's impossible."

"Supposing it were possible. Would you help me?"

"That depends."

Then I told him. He heard me out without interrupting once. When I'd said what I had to say, he remained silent for a moment. Then he said, "It's absolutely useless, Anthony. That man can do nothing. He only wants to get money out of you and then the chances are he'll blackmail you. He's probably trading on your being my nephew and my being of Austrian origin."

"Does that mean you won't give me the money?"

"It means this. War is war and we've all got to pay for it. You were one of those who wanted war. I'm not condemning you but now the war has reached you, you find it isn't what you thought. Pray God, the boy will be spared. But he'll have to take his chance like the rest. I could not lend myself to any underhand dealings to get him off and if you take my advice, you'll give Mr. Melrose the cold shoulder."

He spoke slowly and the words seemed to come out with difficulty.

“ Is that your last word ? ”

The old man looked at me. I may have been mistaken but I thought I saw a suspicion of a tear in the corner of one of his eyes.

“ No, it isn't my last word. I'm glad you came to see me. I'm glad you feel as you do because it shows me, that at last, you've learnt something.”

I waited. He seemed to be going to say something more but if he was, he thought better of it, for nothing came. I didn't feel angry with him. For some reason I couldn't understand, my resentment had melted away and another feeling, I didn't know what it was, had taken its place. It was as though I had arrived in a country I had been in long ago but where the shape and colour of things had changed and they all looked different. I got up and held out my hand. He took it and held it in his through the passage. In the distance the guns were still booming while we stood at the open door. “ Be a man ” he said as he closed it gently.

XX

THE tears only came when you found me sitting with Trixie in the shelter at the end of the Cliftonville Promenade. Although I saw you walking towards us and tried to prepare myself, I knew it was going to be a bad moment. When you kissed me, the useless tears had to come. They were the first and, once they were over, the last. They didn't relieve me, nothing could, the agony had to wear itself out. From the time he was gazetted, I knew it had to be. Some words in an ode of Horace I had to write out fifty times at Eton, about the only Latin words I've ever remembered, were always jangling in my head, something like "*atra cura post sedet equitem.*" *Atra cura* sat behind me all right all those weeks and weeks, wherever I went, whatever I did, when the boy was with me or away from me. I think you knew, you and Myrtle, but you were the only ones and it was because of that I suppose, that I broke down.

I don't know if you had that awful feeling that the blow must fall, sometimes I thought you must have it, by the way you looked at him.

He was full of affection for you both and so delighted at your letting him stay at Barrington Square after we gave up Northumberland Place and do what he liked there while you were away in the country. How he enjoyed his leaves, coming up and dressing in smart mufti dead against the regulations and playing man about town ; meeting me and Trixie at restaurants and dodging about with all the prettiest girls in the Shows. How he loved coming to the Hammam as you and I used to do, having a snack and a cocktail, dressing there with your André to wait on him and turning out as smart as paint for his stall at the Gaiety.

And all the while the black canker was eating my heart out, giving me no rest by day or by night. You were right when you said, if it had to come, it was best it came quickly. Think of it. One short month, no, one fearfully long month, the longest ever lived from the day I saw him into the train at Victoria to the day I got the telegram, the fourth day he was in the firing line, the first time he went over the top. Thank God he was shot dead, that's my one comfort, and only one bullet ; he wasn't even disfigured. As he was at Victoria, head and shoulders out of the window of the train, stretching out his hand for me to hold one second more while I looked for the last time into his dancing blue eyes, so he was when he fell. There's

nothing more to say ; it was the end of everything for me and I knew it.

I didn't go up to see Nancy. I knew I should be criticised for that, but what was the good ? She had her religion to support her and I should have been as little use to her as she to me. I didn't go to the memorial service either and I left her to do the letter-writing to the Colonel and the others. What did I care what they thought, what anyone thought ? They were all very kind. They were very kind when Jack was killed and Walter, and now they were being very kind about Cyril. I stayed on with Trixie at Margate for a day or two and then we went back to Dante Gardens.

I'm vague about the next months, nothing happened that matters. I know that, gradually, I got calmer and that I used to ask myself how it was possible I could go on bothering about all sorts of unimportant things. But I did. One day I found myself going through the boy's things with Nancy and Edie and deciding quite unemotionally what was to be done with them.

The Rock called upon Nancy regularly ; she had taken rooms at a private hotel, and it was there I saw him first after the boy had been killed. He was looking whiter and older and, though he didn't complain, there was no doubt that his frequent attacks were weakening him.

It seemed to comfort Nancy to talk about the boy freely. I think she'd taken the cue from Aunt Kate who did the same about Jack. These religious women have a way of behaving as though the dead aren't dead and know all they say and do. It didn't matter to me one way or the other. Cyril was dead so far as I was concerned and nothing could bring him to life again or give me the slightest semblance of comfort.

The Rock never mentioned his name and I could see Nancy's allusions made him uncomfortable. His attitude to me was a little different, but not much, to what it had always been, he seemed to be watching me, I thought. He wasn't watching me as closely as I was watching myself. I'd felt less bitter ever since the evening I spoke to him about Melrose and though he never said a word to me, I was certain the boy's death had been a hard blow to him. At first I had an idea, perhaps I might call it a hope, that it would bring us together but as time went on and I saw that it didn't and wouldn't, I hardened towards him. He knew we were hard up, he knew that we had been forced to give up Northumberland Place because of the heavy income-tax, and yet, in spite of that on the top of our grief, he never offered to do a damn thing. And all that time the Bank was pressing me to pay off that infernal

overdraft and I was obliged to cut things down more and more to keep them quiet.

Then I got bronchitis and you came to see me. I don't believe I was as bad as the doctor said but anyhow Trixie told you that the money was on my mind and was preventing my recovery and you went to the old man without saying anything to me. I suppose he knew about it when he climbed up all those stairs to see me. I can't remember now whether it was before or after my seeing you, but he said nothing about it. It was just like him to come. He would always take any sort of trouble if he thought it was his duty, apart from any question of feeling. What he called affection was habit, nothing more. He had no more affection for me than I had for him, he was old and infirm; but I was his nephew. I had lost my son and I was ill, so he came to see me. He was very polite to Trixie. It was the first time she had ever seen him and she said, "What a dear old man," she couldn't understand why I didn't get on with him. He was always a dear old man to people who didn't know what it was to be under his thumb, to have their lives controlled by him.

After I got well, Trixie and I went down to the cottage you'd found for us not far from yours. The weary war dragged on. Francis was home on sick leave, and you and Myrtle were dreading

the moment when he would be well and able to go out again. My head told me what you were feeling, but my heart didn't respond. I realised that without any feeling of shame. If I thought about it at all, I should have been glad that I cared for nobody and nothing except to have money enough to do what I pleased, as soon as the war was over.

The Rock was spending the summer with Aunt Kate in the Isle of Wight and news reached me through Nancy that he was failing fast. My one thought was, what position should I find myself in when he died? Then you heard from Olivia that he was back at Mount Street and you went up to see him. He told you he thought he could see the end of the war, that was what he was living for; to see his sisters once more and to make them comfortable for life. You asked him to tell you if there was anything you could do. "No, nothing." You said his will-power was amazing. The attacks were continual but the moment he got over them, he went to the City. He'd given up his car because of the expense and when he couldn't get a taxi, he actually walked to the Tube on his servant's arm.

He lasted through the early autumn. The doctors told us he couldn't live more than a few weeks, but he didn't give in. They kept him alive with morphia, and he got up and dressed.

He couldn't go to the City but he gave his orders over the telephone and Kahn and Bellows came to make their report morning and evening. Only at the very last, his mind wandered and he spoke constantly about his will, telling everyone a different story about it. He died on the eighth of November. On the eleventh the guns were firing salvos to announce the Armistice as The Rock's coffin was being lowered into the grave, beside that of the only human being he ever truly loved, his brother's. And the eleventh of November was the governor's birthday.

XXI

AFTER all, the old man treated me fairly. His fortune was about a third of what it would have been but for the war and of that he bequeathed a tenth to charity, but there was enough for everyone to get a decent share. Mine, as you know, enabled me to pay my debt to the Bank and left a nice little surplus in hard cash.

For some time before The Rock's death, in fact not long after the boy was killed, I had been thinking of getting Nancy to divorce me. We had been nothing to each other for years if we ever were. It took her a long time to discover my infidelities but, once she did, whatever the feeling might be called she had for me died a natural and painless death. Nancy was slow and very sure. In her quiet, virtuous way she made up her mind to ignore my misdeeds but to put me finally and for ever out of her life. Edie had always taken her mother's view about everything and I had encouraged her to do so. The boy was so entirely on my side and he so filled my life, that it wouldn't have been fair, even had she wanted to, for the girl to come over to me as well.

Trixie had been awfully good. There was no pretence between us of romance or passion, we were just good pals. When the blow fell, she did her best for me, when I was ill, she nursed me, while I was hard up, she stuck to me. What more could she do? She was the only living creature who had a claim on me and she never made it. It was I who proposed it but she wouldn't decide until I had consulted you and Myrtle. She said she didn't mean to have it said that she had dragged me down. Awful nonsense, of course, and equally of course you two thought I was right to marry her if Nancy was willing to divorce. So the matter was settled.

Some time before, I had commissioned Stanford to do a posthumous portrait of Cyril from photographs. I wanted him to sit during those last months and got him to Stanford's studio several times but there were so many things the darling boy wanted to do when he came up on leave, I hadn't the heart to persuade him to give up hours of it to sittings and so the picture was never painted. But Stanford had seen a good deal of him as I often asked him to come out with Cyril and me which the good, gentle creature thought the most exciting thing in the world. It was Stanford's idea to go down to a village he knew of on the Cornish coast where he could paint the portrait at his ease and I could watch it and make suggestions. That suited

Trixie and me all right, our intention being to stay there a few weeks and then go to France until the divorce was a *fait accompli*. So she chucked her engagement at the Lyric and we went down to Portherrack and took the whole inn. It was a cosy little place high up on the rocky cliff with a view straight out to sea. The windows opened into a garden at the back where there was a shed which Stanford made into a studio, and we three settled down comfortably. I was happier and more at peace than I had ever hoped to be, walking along the cliffs with Trixie, reading a bit and watching the picture grow. I knew you didn't think much of Stanford as an artist but he was fond of the boy and I knew he'd do his damndest. And he did. From the first strokes, it was an amazing likeness. After he'd painted the face, I made him stand the easel in my bedroom so that I could see it the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. I was nearly always awake when the sun rose over the cliffs ; I could see the waves sparkling as the rays fell on them and in a few minutes they touched the boy's hair and powdered it with gold. When they got lower and reached the face, I got out of bed and turned the easel round so that the canvas should be in shadow because the paint marks showed up blotchy. But I thought he looked best in the evening time just before it got dark. I used to have a look at

him after we finished our early supper, before we went for our stroll. He smiled at me as though he was saying "Go on and have your walk, daddy, enjoy your cigar. I'll see you when you come in." And I always made the others turn back in time for me to see him again before it got dark. I didn't tell them why and sometimes they wanted to go on.

The days got a little shorter and, one beautiful evening, they were so disappointed at my wanting to go back that I made them continue their walk and came back alone. When I got to the inn, there wasn't a soul about. Drink couldn't be served in the little bar after eight and the widow who kept the place was out, gossiping with some neighbour, I suppose. I went into my bedroom, impatient to have my usual look at the picture and I shut the door behind me, before I noticed, sitting on my bed with her eyes glued on it, the little maid who served our meals and took her turn at the bar. I'd often thought how pretty and sweet she was and in her Cornish peasant way remarkably refined, with her dark eyes and hair and fresh milk-white skin. But, strange to say, in spite of my rakish habits, I hadn't paid much attention to her. It may have been because my mind was too full of the boy and it may simply have been because she was so young that I regarded her as a child. But when I came upon her, unexpectedly like

that, sitting on my bed with her face outlined against the evening light, gazing at the portrait, I was suddenly struck by her prettiness. She jumped up and began apologising in a confused way. "I couldn't help sitting and looking at him. He's so lovely."

What else do you who know me consider I could have done than I did do? I sat down on the bed myself and pulled her down beside me, put my arm round her and kissed her. "Just you sit here with me. We'll look at him together," I said.

And when, without the slightest sign of resentment or embarrassment, quite naturally and sweetly, she did sit there beside me, when indeed, she went further and put her arm round my shoulder, I kissed her again on the neck, where her soft hair waved upwards behind her ears. The smell of her hair and of her skin mounted to my head like wine, her unabashed simplicity intoxicated me, I kissed her again and again, I held her firm young body to me, I buried my head in her neck, I smothered her with kisses. A door slammed. I had just sense enough to free her. She put her two hands to her head and tidied her hair before she went, softly and quite unconcernedly, out of the room.

I needn't say much more about her. What came after that was inevitable, once the desire for her took hold. It was an almost rainless

July ; every evening we three started for our walk and every evening I returned alone. I could count with almost complete certainty on an hour or more alone with Delia.

At last the weather changed, there was a thunderstorm. It cleared after supper, but I insisted on our not missing our walk and I set the pace so that we should get as far as possible. When I turned back as usual, some heavy drops began to fall, I had some difficulty in persuading Trixie not to come with me. I had to pretend I wanted to be alone and told her not to hurry back, to take shelter if it came down hard. I knew Stanford was getting spoony, that he was flirting with her in his harmless, sentimental way ; I could count on his keeping her back as long as he could. And I ran back through the rain as fast as my cracked old lungs would let me.

Delia had always waited for me in my room, which it was one of her duties to prepare for the night, but that evening, as I passed through the bar, there were two men there, and Mrs. Tregenion behind the counter. She had abandoned her usual visits to neighbours on account of the weather and was probably supplying surreptitious pints to them instead. I cursed her as I went into the bedroom. Everything had been done but no Delia, of course. I went back to the sitting-room and flung myself on to

the rickety sofa, which gave way under me. Any excuse was good enough. I went into the passage and yelled "Delia, Delia."

She came at once, closing the door behind her and put her fingers on her lips. "Daddy's in the bar," she said.

We propped up the sofa and I kissed her, I was on fire to possess her again but it was utterly impossible.

I went into the bar. I had no difficulty in persuading Mrs. Tregenion to break the licensing laws. I stood "daddy" and his friend drinks. They were both copper miners, thick, hunky men with muscles of steel. When Trixie and Stanford came back, I was still carousing with them, Mrs. Tregenion had had several glasses of what she called port and was pretty well on. Trixie and Stanford went into the sitting-room where the harmless flirtation could continue: I heard the sofa go down with a smash a few minutes after they'd been in there. I'd had enough whisky to enjoy the joke hugely when I ran in and saw them looking at each other in shamefaced dismay. I consoled them and went back to the bar.

At midnight "daddy" and his friend reeled out and I helped Mrs. Tregenion lock up. I also helped her to her room. I pretended to think the door on the other side of the passage was hers and opened it clumsily. A little figure in

white called "Who's that?" and I closed it as the fat landlady said "No, this is mine" and stumbled in through the opposite door. When I came down, the others had gone to bed. I undressed and crept upstairs again. She was expecting me.

How it got about I don't know. One can never tell in country villages what the people see or say or think, but especially not in Cornwall, where they are more clannish than Scots. I was pretty self-protective, experience had taught me to be, but I got reckless. I fancy Mrs. Tregonion began to suspect something after a while. I certainly had reason not only to suspect her but to know that "daddy's" chum found comfortable night-quarters at the Trevelyan Arms and I supposed, probably quite wrongly, what with that and my being a profitable customer, that she'd keep her mouth shut.

I asked Delia what her father would do if he knew. "Oh Daddy wouldn't care s'long as I didn't get into trouble," was her answer.

"Daddy" was often in the bar and whenever I saw him, we had a drink together. He was a taciturn sort of chap but he always seemed pleased to see me and shook hands heartily enough. Once I saw him outside another and inferior pub; he seemed to have been drinking and there were several young men round him. When I nodded to him, he turned his head

away. I attached no importance to that, I supposed he was embarrassed at my seeing him at what Mrs. Tregenion disparagingly called "The Tap." Even when he came in that afternoon and asked to see me, I didn't suspect anything. It wasn't till he refused a drink that the faintest shadow crossed my mind, but when he said "I want to have a word outside" I looked at him and I looked at Mrs. Tregenion on the other side of the counter. I noticed she turned her head away. It flashed through my brain to ask him to wait and to go to my room and slip my revolver into my pocket. But something prevented me, some feeling that if he intended to go for me, I should make matters worse if I used it.

We walked on down the cliff path side by side without speaking. When we got to the little open space they call Dinas Hole, he faced round at me. Then I knew I was in for it and I clenched my fists. He just called me some name and hit out at me. I dodged that blow easily enough but I knew the game was up. If I tried to bolt, his pals would be waiting to round me up. I was a flabby, untrained, middle-aged man, I had never been a boxer and I could make no more impression on that hulk of solid bone and muscle, on that mask of tanned leather stuffed like a cricket ball, than if I hit a dummy. He punched me and then he took hold of me round

the waist and got me down. When I was on the ground he kicked me several times in the ribs with his huge hob-nailed miner's boots. When I heard them crack, I knew he'd done me in.

I wasn't angry. I knew the poor ignorant blighter had been worked up to the job and had to finish it. He didn't want to do it. His pals had made him think he would be a skunk if he didn't lay me out. So there it was. I don't know how long I lay there. I didn't suffer much but I couldn't move without agony. Someone found me at last and they carried me back. Trixie got a doctor and wired you to come with a nurse. You were just in time to hear all I had to say—"I asked for it."

THE END

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